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OLD!

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SUPER SPRINT
WHY THE TOP-DOWN RACER STILL RETAINS POLE POSITION

FESTIVE SPECIAL

12 ESSENTIAL GAMES TO PLAY OVER THE HOLIDAYS

THE MAKING OF... S.W.I.V.
MULTIPLAYER MAYHEM WITH STORM'S 16-BIT HIT

SHINING FORCE
YOUR GUIDE TO SEGA'S CLASSIC STRATEGY EPIC

THE MAKING OF... BOUNDER
THE STORY OF THE LITTLE TENNIS BALL THAT COULD

Atari ST HOW THE 16-BIT POWERHOUSE SAVED ATARI'S SKIN

Activisionaries THE PEOPLE AND GAMES THAT MADE ACTIVISION

ALSO IN THIS ISSUE...

TURTLES IN TIME
THE HEROES IN A HALFSHELL LET RIP IN KONAMI'S AWESOME BEAT-'EM-UP

METAL SLUG 7
HOW SNK PLAYMORE TOOK THE CLASSIC NEO-GEO BLASTER BACK TO ITS ROOTS

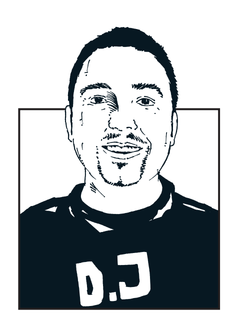
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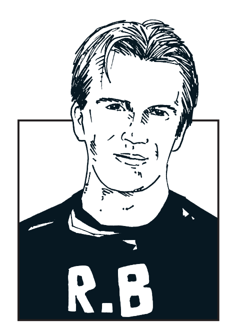
THE RETROBATES

BEST GAME TO PLAY AT CHRISTMAS



DARRAN JONES

Like David Crookes I should be investing in *Wii Fit*, but why do that when you can sit down and gaze at the sheer beauty that is *Christmas NiGHTS*?
Expertise: Juggling a wife, magazine and two kids
Currently playing:
Far Cry 2
Favourite game of all time:
Robotron: 2084



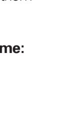
RICHARD BURTON

For old time's sake and because it's one of the few games my mum has attempted to play and vaguely enjoyed, it'll be the Amstrad version of *Manic Miner*.
Expertise: Stuff, things, nonsense and stuff
Currently playing:
Sensible Soccer
Favourite game of all time:
Manic Miner



STUART HUNT

For me, the game to play over the holidays has to be *Shenmue*. Its wintery setting and festive ambience provides the ultimate virtual Christmas experience.
Expertise:
Games with flying bits in them
Currently playing:
Gears Of War 2
Favourite game of all time:
Gears Of War 2





CRAIG GRANNELL

'Guess how much less I should have eaten, in order to not feel unwell,' along with whatever handheld title someone was kind enough to buy me.
Expertise:
Games you don't need 37 fingers to control
Currently playing:
Juggle the deadlines
Favourite game of all time:
H.E.R.O.



PAUL DRURY

Get drunken uncles and inebriated aunts to fall out over arm-flailing sessions of *Mario & Sonic At The Olympic Games*. Sherry-fuelled festive fun.
Expertise: Getting old programmers to confess their drug habits
Currently playing:
Far Cry 2
Favourite game of all time:
Sheep In Space



DAVID CROOKES

With a tum stuffed with pudding and days of turkey to wade through, maybe *Wii Fit* will be in order this year. Failing that, a good old-fashioned *Sensible Soccer* tournament never fails.
Expertise: All things Amstrad CPC, *Dizzy*, Atari Lynx and PlayStation
Currently playing:
Fallout 3
Favourite game of all time:
Broken Sword



ASHLEY DAY

You mean aside from the 'try to get home for Christmas using terrible public transport' game? In that case, it's *Christmas NiGHTS*. I've played it every year since 1996.
Expertise: The games of Team 17, MSX, Sega's *Shining Force* series
Currently playing:
Gears Of War 2
Favourite game of all time:
Shining Force III

LOADING...

Well, it's taken three long years, but we've finally convinced Oli Frey to draw us a classic Christmas cover to celebrate our December issue. Longtime fans of both *Crash* and Oliver's work will realise that he's revisiting one of his classic covers from yesteryear, but with the original piece of art long since lost to him (it was given away as a prize), he was keen to rework the popular design.

So, with a spanking new cover and the big day only a few short weeks away, let's tell you what you can expect to find in this month's issue. Oli explains the process behind his beautiful cover on page 44, while we're also taking a look at 12 fun games to get you into the Christmas spirit.

Festivities aside, you'll also notice that the magazine has undergone a few cosmetic changes here and there this month as well. Expect these to continue over the coming months and as always, don't forget to voice your opinions on the forum.

So, all that's really left to say is have a great Christmas and we'll see you all next year.

Enjoy the magazine





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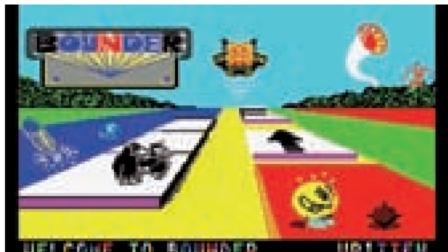


» **Load 58** Breathing new life into classic games

FEATURED

RETRO REVIVALS

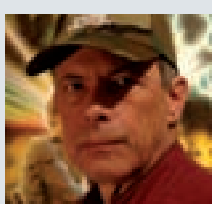


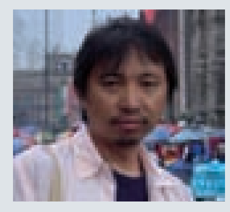




This month we've been chatting to...









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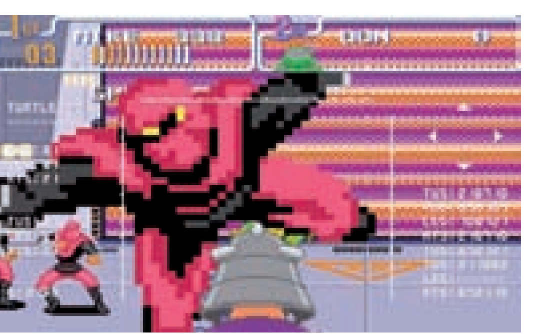
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" The Technodrome was an exclusive level gifted to the SNES port "

Stuart Hunt



30 THE CLASSIC GAME

Why Konami's *Turtles In Time* remains one of the company's greatest scrolling fighters

ESSENTIALS



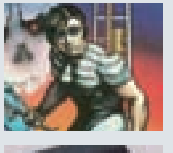
RETRO RATED

66 HISTORY OF SHINING FORCE

The complete story behind Sega's amazing strategy series



retro GAMER.net READER'S REVIVAL



22 MR PUNIVERSE

Reader Clarance Frank goes on the record and reveals his love/hate relationship with Mastertronic's platformer.

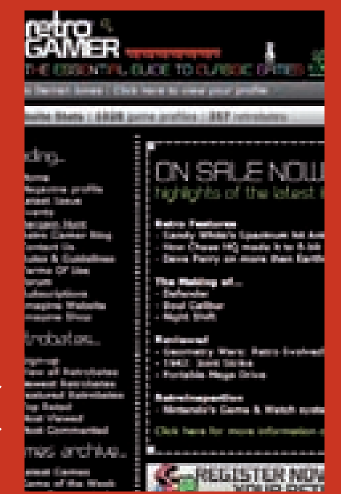


94 SUPER SPRINT

Ian Marks explains why Atari's classic top-down racer remains one of his favourite arcade games.

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www.retrogamer.net

SEGA MEGA DRIVE MEGA ULTIMATE MEGA COLLECTION… SOUNDS MEGA

SEGA UNVEILS ITS LATEST MEGA DRIVE COLLECTION

Sega has recently announced the release of its colossal 40-game *Sega Mega Drive Ultimate Collection* for the PlayStation 3 and Xbox 360, which is due out in early 2009. And the best thing about it is that it's going to feature a complete *Streets Of Rage* collection.

Since Sega's announcement, however, there has followed much furore from Sega fans regarding the early press shots of the pack, which showed the Mega Drive's glorious 16-bit sprites being subjected to that peculiar wishy-washy pixel-filter treatment that make the graphics look like they were shaped with potatoes presses and coloured using oil pastels. Anyway, since the outcry from fans, Sega has announced that this 'smoothing' filter will be made optional.

Speaking to RPGSite, a Sega representative said: "I've had confirmation that the filter can indeed be switched off. The games will display at whatever ratio your console is set at – 4:3 or 16:9. If playing in 16:9, the game will fit and not have black borders at the side."

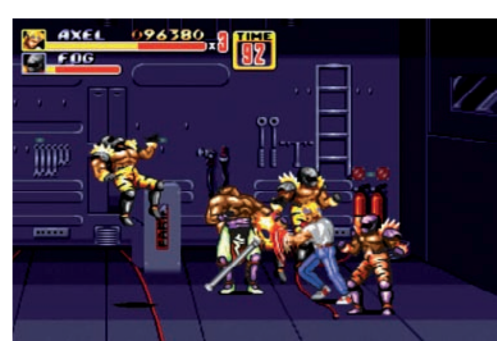
As well as the *Streets Of Rage* games, the pack will also include *Sonic 1*, *2* and *3*, *Space Harrier*, *Alien Storm*, *Ecco The Dolphin* and is rumoured to include all the Mega Drive *Shining Force* titles, too (incidentally, the complete history of the *Shining Force* series can be found on page 66).

Improving things further, Sega also announced that it is planning to add Achievements and Trophies to the games – probably things such as gaining 10,000 points for punching 50 guys called Radar in *Streets Of Rage II*, or actually having the willpower and attention span to finish *Ecco The Dolphin*.

This colossal 16-bit pack, which is being developed by Backbone Entertainment, will officially become the largest compilation of Sega games to ever be made available when it's released next year. And, as if the prospect of playing through 40 classic Mega Drive games wasn't exciting enough, there's the news that Sega is also planning to include a bevy of unlockable 8-bit SMS content, too. With all of that in mind, this is shaping up to be a pretty comprehensive compilation pack indeed.

We suspect that the prospect of owning an impressive, and legitimate, Mega Drive collection is certainly something that many Sega fans simply won't be able to pass up – us included. We just can't wait to get our hands on this title.

At the moment there's no word on the price of the collection, although we do speculate that it won't be a full-priced release, especially seeing as many of the games have already been made available for download through the Xbox Marketplace. But we promise to keep you posted on any further developments.



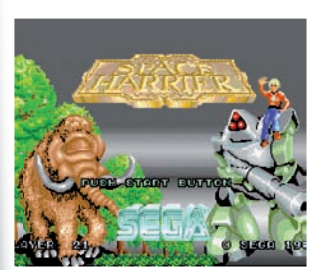




NEW SPACE HARRIER?

WELL, IT ALL DEPENDS ON YOU

TEZ OKANA REVEALS HIS POTENTIAL NEXT PROJECT



During a recent interview about his work on *Thunder Force VI*, director Tez Okana exclusively revealed that he would savour the opportunity to tackle another one of Sega's classic games for his next project. The title in question is, of course, *Space Harrier* (the clue was in the title), but fans of the game shouldn't start crying tears of joy just yet, because Okana also dropped the bombshell that the viability of any future projects, including *Space Harrier*, would depend on the success of *Thunder Force VI*. Basically, unless *Thunder Force VI* does the business, it looks highly unlikely that a new *Space Harrier* will ever come to fruition. *Thunder Force VI* has already been released in Japan, and is currently available to buy on import through www.play-asia.com. While we've not yet had the opportunity to play the game (early word has been very promising – although it does appear that the difficulty and longevity of the game has come in for some criticism), Darran has recently purchased himself a Japanese PS2 with the intention of ordering a copy of *Thunder Force VI*. When we do eventually get our mitts on the game, you can be sure that a review will follow. In the meantime we urge you all to buy a copy, because if Sega realises that shmups still sell we might get to see even more classic blasters return in the future.

THE BELMONTS ARE COMING



THE PS3 AND 360 GEAR UP FOR SOME HEAVY BLOODLETTING

Three dimensions and *Castlevania* have had a chequered past. Basically, the 3D games have never really lived up to the revered legacy that was laid down by their 2D forebears. But perhaps the family fortunes are about to change. Series producer Koji Igarashi recently revealed, at this year's Tokyo Game Show, that a new current-gen *Castlevania* title will be heading to both the PlayStation 3 and Xbox 360. While details about the game at this stage are a little on the scant side, Igarashi did treat attendees to a cryptic teaser trailer showing a shadowy figure with blonde hair holding a glowing red sword. Lucky them. While it's not yet known what form the game will take (if it is going to be 3D, please God let it be something in the slick and bloody style of *Ninja Gaiden II*), we hope that Konami really gets behind it to help resurrect the franchise and attract new blood to the company's classic vampire-hunting series.

LAST-MINUTE NEWS

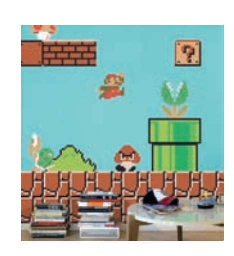


Could this be the greatest invention since the 'Tower Burger'?

STELLA ADAPTOR

We were recently informed that AtariAge has finally got the very popular Stelladaptor 2600 back in stock. The little dongle, which has a nine-pin 'D' connector one end and a USB connector at the other, allows old-school joysticks, and 2600 paddles and controllers to work on PCs and Macs. The adaptor is incredibly simple to use, too. Just plug it in and away you go – there's no need to install and clog up your computer with messy drivers or wrestle with a soldering iron. The Stelladaptor 2600 is available now from the AtariAge Store – be aware though, they're likely to sell out very quickly.

COMPETITION:



WIN A SET OF NINTENDO WALL GRAPHICS

Are you fed up with staring at bland white walls everyday? Perhaps your Artex hallway is proving to be a real pain in the arse?

If so, then what you need is an innovative wall graphic, featuring some of the most popular Nintendo videogame heroes, to add some spice to your walls. Manufactured by BLIK, the wall decals have proved hugely popular in the US. The sets are moveable and reusable, and quickly add style, colour and character (quite literally) to any boring old home. There are currently three sets in the range, including *Donkey Kong*, *Super Mario Bros.* and *New Super Mario Bros.*, and all are available exclusively from Supernice and will set you back a cool £65. We currently have five sets to give away, courtesy of those nice guys at Supernice. In order to be in with a chance of getting your hands on one, all you need to do is answer this simple question.

Q) What was the first videogame release to have gamers knocking down a multicoloured wall?

Just email your answer to us at retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk or send your answer on the back of a postcard to Retro Gamer Competition, Imagine Publishing, 33 Richmond House, Richmond Hill, Bournemouth, BH2 6EZ. The competition closes on 31/12/08.

[Terms and Conditions]

1.This competition is run by Imagine Publishing

2.By entering our competition, you agree to be bound by all rules relating to the competition (and which may be changed at any time without notice).

3.This competition is open to all residents of Europe and other PAL territories excluding employees of Imagine Publishing and Supernice Limited, their families, suppliers, agents, associates or anyone professionally associated with this competition. Entrants under 16 years of age must have a parent or guardian's permission to enter. Only one entry per email address is permitted. Multiple entries from the same email address or from the same individual will be counted as one entry. Imagine Publishing may request proof of eligibility to enter the competition.

4.In the event of any dispute, Imagine Publishing's decision is final, and no correspondence will be entered into.

5.All eligible entrants who register before midnight on 30/12/08 will be entered into the competition. Winners will be drawn on 05/01/09.

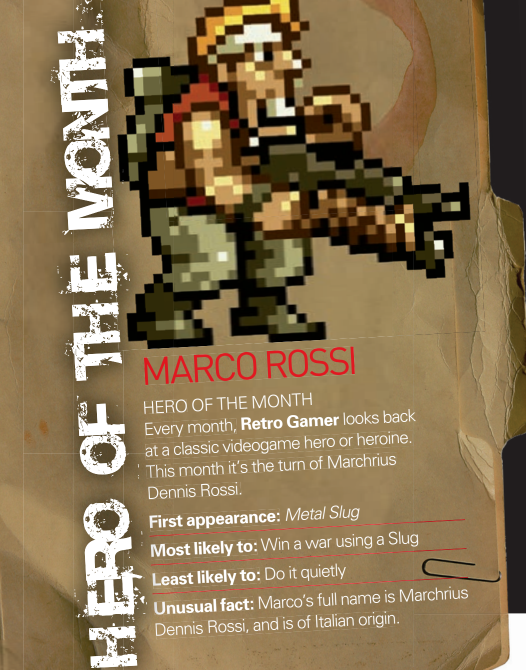
6.First Prize will be one set of BLIK wall graphics.

7.All prizes are non-transferable, no cash alternative will be offered. We reserve the right in our sole discretion to substitute any prize with an alternative of comparable value. All prizes are subject to the terms and conditions of the manufacturer or supplier.

8.The winner will be notified by email on. To claim the prize the winner must confirm acceptance within 30 days.

9.The winner consents to the use of their name and image being used for publicity purposes.

10.These competition Terms and Conditions shall be governed by, and construed in accordance with, English law and are subject to the non-exclusive jurisdiction of the English Courts



MARCO ROSSI

HERO OF THE MONTH

Every month, **Retro Gamer** looks back at a classic videogame hero or heroine. This month it's the turn of Marchrius Dennis Rossi.

First appearance: *Metal Slug*

Most likely to: Win a war using a Slug

Least likely to: Do it quietly

Unusual fact: Marco's full name is Marchrius Dennis Rossi, and is of Italian origin.

SOUNDS SENSIBLE

NEW 'SENSIBLE SOCCER' STYLE INDIE FOOTBALL GAME LACES ITS BOOTS

If you're looking for a break from *FIFA 09* or are perhaps looking for a game to while away a few lunch hours with, then Peter Cox, of Red 27 Studios, could provide you with your very own field of dreams, so to speak.

His indie project *Awesome Soccer* is a labour of love and a football game that pays homage to some of the greats of the beautiful game, while also incorporating some of the modern features that fans of *PES* and *FIFA* will be well versed in. "My aim was to retain all of the things that made *Kick Off 2* and *Sensible Soccer* great – ie fantastic gameplay – but to (hopefully) add some modern sheen and polish, and to incorporate the new features that we've become accustomed to within the genre, through games like *Pro Evo*/*Winning Eleven* and *FIFA*," comments Peter, who first began the project while studying at university. He also tells us that the game is almost complete and is currently going through the 'testing phase'. If you want to find out some more details about the game, then make sure you check out his website at www.red27studios.com.



Awesome Soccer is shaping up very nicely indeed – it even has one of the *FIFA* offside markers, to stop you from hurling abuse at the linesman.

retro* GAMER DIARY

THINGS TO LOOK FORWARD TO...



Just because **Retro Gamer** looks to the past doesn't mean there aren't plenty of games and events to look forward to. Every month we list all the exciting games and events for you to add to your 'to do' list



JANUARY 09

HOUSE OF THE DEAD: OVERKILL

Released: 30 January 2009

Publisher: Sega

Price: £34.99

Format: Wii

No Stefan this month, so we've had to close our eyes and just imagine how good this latest *House Of The Dead* is going to be. Fortunately, our imaginations are pretty vivid, so we've set high standards for Sega's latest lightgun game. Only a little while longer to wait and we'll discover if it's as good as we're expecting. We have faith in you, Sega.



FEBRUARY 09

THE KING OF FIGHTERS: THE OROCHI SAGA

Released: 06 February 2009

Publisher: SNK

Price: £19.99

Format: PS2, PSP, Wii

We've always had a soft spot for SNK's *King Of Fighters* franchise, so we're quite looking forward to this five-game compilation. Being based on the excellent Orochi Saga, it means we not only get the brilliant *KOF '96*, but also the truly excellent *KOF '98* as well. Providing the emulation isn't messed up this could be an essential purchase.



FEBRUARY 09

CASTLEVANIA: ORDER OF ECCLESIA

Released: 6 February 2009

Publisher: Konami

Price: £29.99

Format: DS

We've no idea why this has been put back until next year (it's already available Stateside) and hope it's not going to suffer from the same fate as the excellent *Contra 4*. We love what we've played through so far (the new animation and sprites look fantastic), so it's gutting to think that we're going to have to wait a little bit longer.



FEBRUARY 09

SONIC AND THE BLACK KNIGHT

Opens: 6 February 2009

Publisher: Sega

Price: £34.99

Format: Wii

We really enjoyed *Sonic And The Secret Rings*, so we're more than a little intrigued about the next game in the series. We're not too sure if having access to a giant sword is that good an idea, after all, Sonic hasn't exactly been true to his roots over the last few years, but it should prove a handy weapon if Shadow decides to show his ugly face.



FEBRUARY 09

BIONIC COMMANDO

Released: 13 February 2009

Publisher: Capcom

Price: £34.99-£49.99

Format: Xbox 360, PS3, PC

We'll admit to being rather excited about *Bionic Commando* now. GRIN might not be that well known a name within the industry, but we were very impressed with its Xbox Live Arcade offering *Bionic Commando: Rearmed*. Seemingly based on the *Lost Planet* engine, this already looks like it's captured the spirit of the NES original, even if the viewpoint is completely new. Now everyone buy it so that Capcom makes a new *Strider*.



FEBRUARY 09

STREET FIGHTER IV

Released: 20 February 2009

Publisher: Capcom

Price: £39.99-£49.99

Format: Xbox 360, PS3, PC

After being absolutely blown away by our playtest a few months back, we've been slowly drowning in a pool of ever-growing love juice. Early reports from sister magazine **Play** suggest that the home versions are every bit as good as the arcade original, while Capcom has also included several additional characters, with Sakura, Gen and Cammy all confirmed. We're still crossing our fingers that Hugo gets included as well.



MARCH 09

GAUNTLET

Released: 7 March 2009

Publisher: Eidos

Price: £29.99

Format: DS

Another DS game slips to next year. Like *Castlevania: Order Of Ecclesia* we've been really enjoying *Gauntlet*, so it saddens us that Backbone Entertainment's game has suffered such a big delay. Maybe, it's so it can include arcade-perfect ports of the original games, but it's probably just to ensure that it doesn't get lost in the Christmas rush. Regardless, it's definitely a title to keep your eye on.



MARCH 09

POPULOUS

Released: 27 March 2009

Publisher: Rising Star Games

Price: £29.99

Format: DS

Considering Electronic Arts owns the rights to *Populous*, it's somewhat worrying that its not publishing one of its own games. While we've not played the Japanese version, many reviews suggested that it suffered from the same issues – fiddly control, cramped playing area – that befelll the original *SimCity DS* release. Hopefully these issues won't appear once the UK version finally arrives. Time to cross those fingers.

MAILBAG

HAVE YOUR SAY… SEND US A LETTER OR MAKE YOURSELF HEARD ON THE ONLINE FORUM – WWW.RETROGAMER.NET

SO BAD IT'S GOOD

Dear Retro Gamer,
I realise that you now write a regular article about rubbish games called Retro Shamer, but have you ever thought about covering really bad game cover art? There have been some truly horrendous cover art images drawn over the years, and they always give me quite a chuckle whenever I look at them, so I've attached quite a few of my favourites for you to enjoy.

Also, I'm trying my hardest to track down an old adventure game for the Amiga. I can't for the life of me remember what it was called and can only remember the following information about it: the game was text entry and was fairly early on in the Amiga's life. It was largely set in a castle. One of the rooms was a dining hall, but all the food had decayed. If you tried to eat the food, you died.

If you or any **Retro Gamer** readers can help me out with my dilemma I'd be really grateful.
Jon, via email

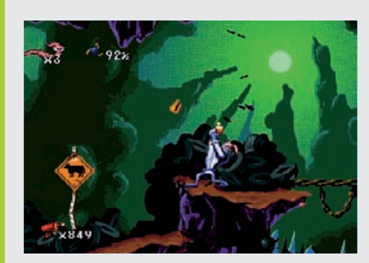


[From Left to Right] ***Incredible Shrinking Fireman, Cyber Rats*** **and** ***Mad Nurse*****, just some of the many bad pieces of box art Jon sent to us. Thanks, mate.**

You're right, Jon, some truly awful box art has been released over the years and we regularly cover it on our blog at blog.retrogamer.net. It's definitely worth looking at within the magazine at a future date, though. Unfortunately, we've drawn a big blank on your Amiga request, so with any luck one of our readers will be able to help you out.

STAR LETTER

RETRO GAMER BRITANNIA



Dear Retro Gamer,
Sorry to be clichéd, but I just wanted to say how much I enjoy your magazine. I've also realised that you're not producing a magazine at all, but something entirely unique and far more important. Please allow me to explain.

I work for a well-known retail chain and we recently got in touch with a Japanese company (I'll spare their blushes by not actually naming them) about one of their classic franchises. We were planning a big promotion for one of their incoming games and wanted to do a collage of past classic titles that this character had featured in.

Worryingly, the company in question said something along the lines of 'sorry but we threw that imagery out years ago and don't have any more.' I asked if they would be able to contact their offices in Japan, but they said that it was extremely unlikely that they would have what we needed.

That's when it struck me that **Retro Gamer** is more akin to an encyclopedia than a magazine. Sure it comes out every month and every now and then there will be the odd mistake, but the amount of brand new, never-seen-before articles always manage to impress me. Seeing as certain companies don't seem interested in preserving their own heritages, it's a good job that there's a magazine out there to do it for them.
Mark Barlow, via email

Aw shucks, Mark, that's a really nice thing to say. Sadly though, you do raise a very good point and it's something that we've become painfully aware of over the last three years. We're constantly upset when certain companies are unable to retrieve specific files or sheepishly admit that they've long since disposed of them, but many publishers nowadays are starting to make an effort (if only because they realise there's money to be made). Making videogames to some (not all, mind) was just a job back in the day, and once a project was done they'd simply move on to the next.

WIN!

Every month, one lucky reader will receive an extremely trendy Retro Gamer T-shirt (thankfully, not one worn by Darran) and a snazzy new Retro Gamer binder. All you have to do is present a lucid, thought-provoking piece of literature that melts our souls. Failing that, something funny with swear words in it will go down just as well…



SO THAT'S WHAT IT'S CALLED…

Dear Retro Gamer,
I just wanted to say thanks for the great magazine you have produced. Last month I picked up your magazine in a small independent store called 1Up Games in Edinburgh and took it home to read. I was so impressed and enthralled in nostalgia that I decided to sign up for a subscription. This morning the very first issue of that subscription arrived and I can tell that it's going to be a great year.

Your piece on *Aliens Vs Predator* instantly transported me back to my younger days, while the previous month's article on *Beneath A Steel Sky* actually helped me realise what that game I'd loved all those years ago as a kid had been called.

I had played *BASS* with my Dad, alongside *Blade Runner,* but would have been a little too young to remember exactly what the game was called and knew immediately (when I saw the talking hoover) what the game was.

I was wondering if you are planning to do any pieces, if you have not done so already or in a while, on either the *Monkey Island* series or *Dizzy*?
Wayne Madden, via email





CONTACT US

Snail Mail: Retro Gamer, Imagine Publishing, Richmond House, 33 Richmond Hill, Bournemouth, Dorset, BH2 6EZ

Email: retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk

Next month: Jon Ritman



BURNING QUESTION?

NEXT MONTH we'll be starting a new section where one lucky reader will be able to ask a classic developer those burning issues that have forever been nagging them. So, if you've ever wanted to ask Matthew Smith what his favourite game is, or if Ian Bell would ever consider working with David Braben again, this is your chance. Be sure to head over to the forum and give us any questions you'd want to ask Jon Ritman. The best five questions will then get answered and revealed next month.

Glad to hear that there are still new readers out there who are enjoying the magazine, Wayne. It always amazes us that we're still picking up new readers after all these years – not that we're complaining, of course – and it's great to know that all the hard work each month is appreciated. Although we've not covered either game recently, a making of *The Secret Of Monkey Island* appeared in issue 34, while a making of *Treasure Island Dizzy* featured in issue 45.

> "Retro Gamer is more akin to an encyclopedia than a mag… the amount of brand new, never-seen-before articles always impress me"

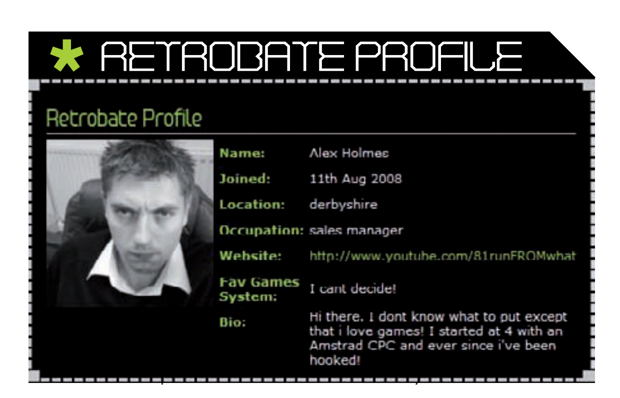
OUT OF AFRICA

Dear Retro Gamer,
I first read **Retro Gamer** last year when I found back issues in a shop in Durban, South Africa and my jaw dropped when I saw it in the stall. I bought up all the issues they had! I had to leave them behind when I left the country, but as soon as I returned to England, I went straight to the shop to buy the latest issue.

Even though I'm a bit young to remember the likes of the Spectrum, I always find a couple of games in each issue that make me say: 'Wow, I loved that game as a kid!' Last issue, *Rampage* and *Beneath A Steel Sky*. Brilliant! So thanks to the guys at **Retro Gamer** for making me feel young again. Although I am only 28…
Matthew Dean, Bristol

Thanks for the kind words, Matthew. We're always stunned when readers discover Retro Gamer in remote parts of the world, so let's do a little experiment. If you ever see Retro Gamer while you're on holiday, take a photo of yourself with it (preferably next to a well-known landmark, or doing something amusing) and send it in to us at the usual address. We'll feature the best ones in the magazine while everything else will appear on the Retro Gamer blog.

RETROBATE PROFILE





Retro Gamer appears in the strangest of places. Here it is in a Japanese videogame store.

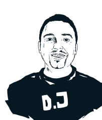
NEO'S TIME HAS COME

Dear Retro Gamer,
While I love your magazine, I can't help but wonder when you're going to cover the Neo-Geo AES. It was a truly incredible home console that was massively ahead of its time and deserves to have plenty of coverage in your fine magazine. Games like *Blazing Star* and *Garou: Mark Of The Wolves* still look absolutely sensational, while I'll never get bored of earlier hits like *Magician Lord* and *NAM-1975*. I have very fond memories of this console (I couldn't afford one myself and used to play on my friend's all the time), so it would be great to relive those past memories. I know that you've looked at both SNK and the arcade side of this fantastic machine, but I'd still love to see a piece on the original home console.
James Smith, Glasgow

You're right, James, SNK's Neo-Geo AES is an impressive piece of kit and we will definitely be covering it very, very soon. Astute readers will have noticed that we've covered virtually all of the most

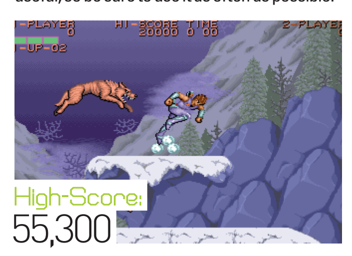
BEAT THE TEAM

Think you're good at retro games? Then see if you can beat the staff at some of their favourite games



DARRAN

CHOSEN GAME: STRIDER
Why I picked it: Oh come on. Was I ever going to choose anything else?
Handy advice: Strider's sliding attack is very useful, so be sure to use it as often as possible.



High-Score: 55,300



STUART

CHOSEN GAME: DONKEY KONG
Why I picked it: Ever since watching *The King Of Kong* I've been determined to beat the high score.
Handy advice: If you peek your head above the top of a ladder barrels won't roll down it.



High-Score: 84,400



ASH

CHOSEN GAME: OCTOPUS
Why I picked it: I bought *Game & Watch Collection 2* on DS and found myself addicted to this Nintendo gem.
Handy Advice: Watch the attack patterns of the tentacles and don't get greedy. Move away from the treasure when you sense danger.



High-Score: 82

From the Forum

» To have your say visit www.retrogamer.net/forum

Every month, Retro Gamer asks a question on the forum and prints the best replies. This month we wanted to know...

What game will you be playing on Christmas Day?

ID: David
None. I will be driving an hour each way to go for dinner with family, with a one-month-old baby in tow.

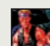
ID: Bub&Bob
In keeping with the true meaning of Christmas, rather than the commercial disgrace it's now become, I will be playing *Bible Adventures* on the NES.


ID: Rinoa
Hopefully I'll be playing one of the following games: *Tomb Raider: Underworld*, *Siren Blood Curse* or *Fallout 3* (all for the PlayStation 3). I'll keep my fingers crossed!

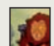

ID: SuperFamiKing
I always throw on *Mario 64* on Christmas Day… It has some excellent Christmassy type levels and still wipes the floor with any of the current-generation games I expect to receive.

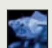

ID: djcarlos
Trivial Pursuit, I would imagine. On the Speccy!


ID: mort
Well, on Christmas Day, I will probably be digging out my copy of *Magic Carpet* on the PC and also *Christmas Lemmings* on the Amiga.


ID: DJevAL
I'll be playing through all the Amstrad games I received as a kid from previous Xmas's past, such as *Ghostbusters II*, *Pac-Land*, *Dan Dare III*, *Mask Two*, *Impossible Mission II*... come to think of it why did my parents buy me so many sequel games?


ID: DonkeySpank
Blockbusters on the Speccy… with all the booze-a-rooney on offer I'll certainly be having a Pee please Bob…


ID: nesmaster
Well, I've been promised a *Metal Slug 2* AES conversion for Christmas, so I'll be playing that!


ID: craigritchie
I will be playing the 'convince the girlfriend that being fat and bloated on turkey and gammon is actually very sexy' game. If I lose that game, I will probably play the *Red Alert 3* game.

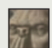

ID: Sir Arthur
On Christmas Day I will be unwrapping *Fallout 3*, *Gears 2* and *COD 5* for the 360 along with *LittleBigPlanet* for the PS3. Boxing Day is going to be play time for me as its family meal time on Christmas Day.


ID: AfterburN003
I will be playing *Lego Batman* and *Ratatouille* for the DS with my daughter. It seems like only yesterday I was getting games from Santa for my Atari 800XL! It sucks getting old. (Maybe Santa could bring me Lara Croft in a skimpy elf outfit if he's reading this.)


ID: Naitch
I'll probably have a good old Speccy session come Christmas for an hour or three. *Jack The Nipper*, *Mermaid Madness*, *Punch & Judy*, *R-Type*. Oh, the festive fun I will Have…

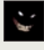

ID: kelp7
Geometry Wars on the Wii hopefully. Thanks, Santa.


ID: Igorthegreen
We'll definitely gather around the fire, plug in the Commodore 64, start up *Maniac Mansion* and put lots of hamsters in the microwave! Even Christmas and peace have their limits!


ID: HEAVYface
'Find the receipt'. The missus is never happy…


ID: fightersmegamix
Same game as every Christmas – *Christmas NiGHTS* on the Saturn. Other than that it will be *Neo Contra* with my nephew on his PS2.

ID: rtrgrl78
Hopefully I'll be playing on the PSP that I'm saving up for. The *Lego Batman* for the DS that Dad's got for me. Might try and make my little cousin play *Jackass* on the PS2. I normally end up playing with him and all his games (he's seven). Or I'll go to my brother's who should have got my lovely nephews a Wii.


ID: FatTrucker
As usual it will be post-Christmas dinner farting comps with my dad. Gets quite competitive, first one to be asked to leave the room wins.


ID: pleccy
Every year I play a Christmas-themed game. This year it will be *Christmas Dizzy* on the Amiga.

ID: Smurph
This year I will be mostly playing anything on the Vectrex which I will get from Santa this year. Definitely.


ID: Sscott
Would like to say *Fallout 3* and *LittleBigPlanet* but my three-year-old daughter is getting *High School Musical: Sing It!* on Wii so we'll be 'playing' that, yay!

YOUR OPINION PLEASE!

MOST PLAYED GAME?

Nintendo&Sega: Hey all. What's been your most played game ever? Mine is undoubtedly *Street Fighter II Turbo* on the SNES. It would be scary to add up the hours I've spent on that game. I still play it to this very day!

boggyb68: *PES* in all its many forms by a country mile… followed by *Tron Deadly Discs* on the Intellivision....

Rupert: I think it might be a three-way tie between *Castle Of Illusion* on the SMS, *Super Mario Land* on the Game Boy and *Civilization* on the PC.

SexyWayne: *SWOS*. I daren't add up the years

Stainy: *Player Manager* on the Amiga.

milo: Most played game ever – the *Marathon* trilogy.

firebreather: *PES* on the PS2, closely followed by *PGA Tour Golf* on Mega Drive and *Supremacy* on C64.

Kaptain_Von: Bit of a tough one this one, but if it came down to it then it would have to be a three-way tie between *Commando* and *Bomb Jack* on the Spectrum and *Quake*.

ZOMBIES?

gman72: Why are zombie games so good and what is your favourite one? Mine still has to be *Zombie Revenge* on the Dreamcast. I love zombie games.

Vir_Lucis: I'm obsessed with zombie movies and the original *Dawn Of The Dead* is my favourite film – so it's a no-brainer that I would love *Dead Rising*!

Trixta: I loved the zombie event on *World Of Warcraft*, too bad they stopped it after all the moaning.

Rabiteman: I thought this thread was about the game *Zombies Ate My Neighbours*. So there's your answer.

ToxieDogg: *Dead Rising* on the Xbox 360 does it for me. I was seriously impressed by that game. I need to go back to it and finish it off properly…

resident paul: The *Resident Evil* series and the *House Of The Dead* series. Does *Ghosts 'N Goblins* arcade count as a zombie game as well?

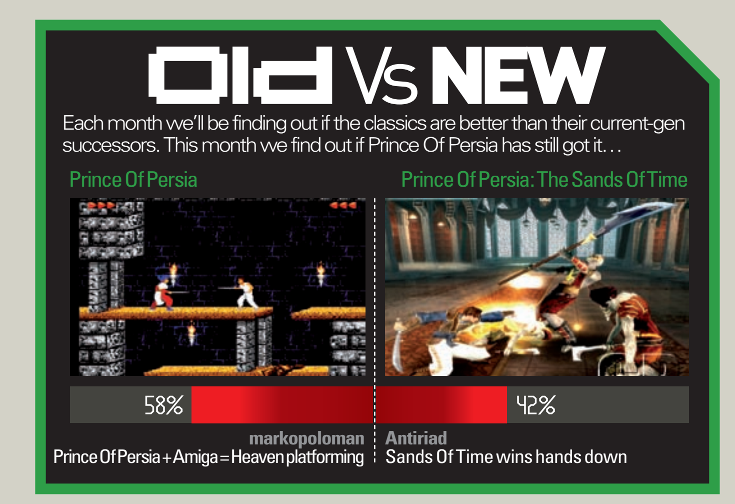
The Penultimate Ninja: The *Left 4 Dead* demo is absolutely amazing.

LEVEL EDITORS?

bonerlaw: Anyone ever use them? I ask as I have just invested in *LittleBigPlanet*, and while I think the game is pretty good… I don't think I will ever be bothered to sit down and create my own level. In fact, I think the only one I ever made was a couple of tracks on Jaguar XJ220 (which were rubbish anyway!).

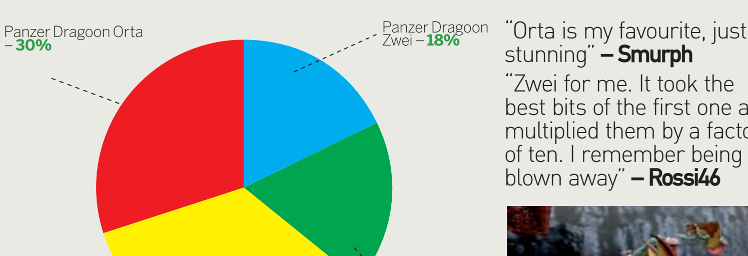
Dan 1980: Only on the original *Sonic* on MD and *Tony Hawks* on PSone and they were a bit rubbish, but if *LittleBigPlanet* is as good as they say I'm sure it will be an excellent feature of the game.

necronom: Yep, I love level editors. I made quite a few levels on *Emerald Mines* on the Amiga (a *Boulder Dash* clone), *Breach 2* (Amiga turn-based strategy game), any car games that allowed it on the C64 and Amiga, SEUCK (Amiga), 3D Construction Kit (Amiga), and now *LBP* (once I've got as many props and materials as I can find in the game).



HOT TOPIC

Here at Retro Gamer we feel that Panzer Dragoon Saga is the greatest game in the series, but how many of our readers agree?



"Orta is my favourite, just stunning" – **Smurph**

"Zwei for me. It took the best bits of the first one and multiplied them by a factor of ten. I remember being blown away" – **Rossi46**



CONTACT US

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» James wants to see the Neo-Geo AES appear in the mag. Here's a picture of the excellent *Garou: Mark Of The Wolves* to tide him over.



» We didn't get around to reviewing *Soul Calibur IV* in Retro Gamer, but that's not to say that future releases like Capcom's *Street Fighter IV* won't make the cut (assuming we're sent code of course…)

» popular machines over the past 40 issues, so it's high time that SNK's amazing console receives its turn in the spotlight.

HELP! I NEED SOMEBODY

Dear Retro Gamer,
I'm an avid reader and loyal subscriber and I need of your help. Years ago there used to be three games I loved playing on my C64. There was *M.U.L.E.* and *Dino Eggs*, but tragically, I can't remember what the third was called. I've been hunting for it online for years, but just can't seem to find any information about it.

What I can recall is it was a bit of a *Pac-Man*/*Gauntlet* clone, has a single-screen maze, you fought snakes and then I think mummies, all to the tune of *Baby Elephant Walk*. It had orange brick for the walls and it had an underlying Egyptian theme. I think it was called '*The Mummy's Tomb*', but that's not it at all because no websites have the information…

I am hoping you might be able to help me track down the name of this title, as it's causing me many sleepless nights? Fingers crossed someone among your staff recalls it, otherwise maybe you can help me in my crusade to find it?

Thanks a lot.

Steve, London

After much deliberation we deduced that the best option would be to put our feelers out to our forum members, and typically they didn't let us down. The closest suggestion we found that fitted your description was Sean McKinnon's *Crystals Of Zong*. While it certainly has an Egyptian/*Pac-Man* theme to it, fans of American composer Henry Mancini may be miffed to find out that the game actually played out to a digital rendition of *Amazing Grace*.

DISCUSSED THIS MONTH

Is innovation in games dead and buried?

This month, Darran and Stuart have been arguing over whether innovation is still alive in videogames. Darran feels that all the best ideas have been fully explored and that many developers are simply retreading old ground, while Stuart argues that the likes of *Mirror's Edge* and *Fallout 3* prove that the industry still has plenty to give. What we'd like to know though is who you actually agree with, so head on over to www.retrogamer.net and start casting your votes.

WHERE'S SOUL CALIBUR?

Dear Retro Gamer,
Please can you tell me why you haven't reviewed *Soul Calibur IV* in your magazine. After seeing it in the diary for so long I was expecting a definitive review, but so far there's not been anything. Does this mean you won't be covering *Street Fighter IV* either?

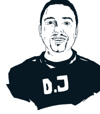
Ben, Salisbury

Sorry, Ben, but we usually review the titles that get sent to us (or we can borrow from other mags). We're definitely planning on reviewing *Street Fighter IV* though.

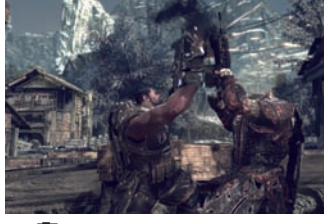
> "Years ago there used to be three games I loved playing on my Commodore 64. There was M.U.L.E. and Dino Eggs, but tragically, I can't remember what the third was called"

* CURRENTLY PLAYING





DARRAN
This month I've been dabbling with Eugene Jarvis's *Defender*. Inspired by our recent article, I've been doing my best to clear the fourth stage. It hasn't happened just yet, but that doesn't stop me from going back for just one more go…





STUART
This month I've been rushing Marcus through *Gears Of War 2* Having scratched *Gears* off my list I'm now turning my attentions to the colourful world of *Banjo-Kazooie: Nuts & Bolts*, which, according to Ash, plays like 'a platform game for cars'.





ASH
It may be running on cutting-edge technology, but this first-person perspective platform game has everything I'd want from a classic. It's built with fun, rather than story, in mind, it presents a decent challenge and it has oodles of time-attack replay value.



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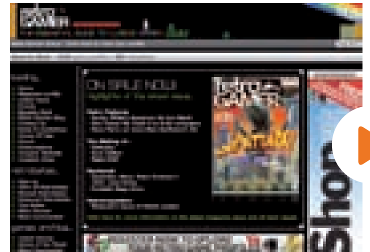


BARGAIN HUNT

DESPERATE TO FINISH OFF YOUR RETRO COLLECTION? WANT TO GET YOUR HANDS ON ALL THE BEST BARGAINS BUT DON'T KNOW WHERE TO GO? THEN VISIT **WWW.RETROGAMER.NET/BARGAIN_HUNT.PHP** AND DISCOVER ALL THE CLASSIC MACHINES THAT YOU'LL EVER NEED

You've been asking for it forever, but we're pleased to announce a brand new look for **Retro Gamer**'s Buyer's Guide section that makes it incredibly easy to get your hands on all the best retro bargains.

Using our new search engine couldn't be easier, as all you need to do is select a manufacturer and machine from the pull-down menu. Once you've found the system you're after the magic of the internet will search eBay for the top 20 ending items, meaning that you'll be able to gauge the market's health with very little effort. This month, Darran's been on the hunt for Atari Lynx pin-badges.



Head on over to the excellent **retrogamer.net** and click on 'Bargain Hunt' or visit www.retrogamer.net/bargain_hunt.php.



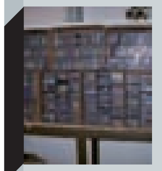
Put in the details for the greatest computer in the world and discuss with your staff writer why it's so much better than the ZX Spectrum.



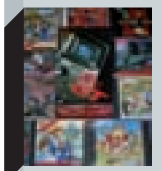
Swoon in delight as you find yourself getting ever closer to collecting all the £1.99 *Simulator* games that Codemasters ever released.

EBAY BARGAINS

This issue we're back on home soil to check out what's currently selling on this side of the Atlantic…



■ If you have a few thousand pounds spare you could use it to own this little lot – a complete NES collection that was going for about £3,000.



■ Darran's been going on about buying a PC-Engine GT for months. Maybe he should bid on this one, which was going for about £126 with 17 games.



■ This nice Virtual Boy pack, which came with all 14 US-released games and a neat little flight case, was practically going for a steal at £173.42.



■ Looking to ruin Christmas for the kids this year? Ditch the Wii and treat them to this little beauty – the Binatone TV Master, a snip at just £9.99.

3DO

3DO GOLDSTAR	**£45+ ($81+)**
PANASONIC FZ-1 (FRONT LOADER)	**£40+ ($74+)**
PANASONIC FZ-10 (TOP LOADER)	**£20+ ($37+)**



ACORN

ARCHIMEDES	**£30 ($55)**
ATOM	**£50 ($92)**
ACORN ELECTRON	**£10 ($18)**
BBC MICRO	**£15 ($28)**



AMSTRAD

CPC 464	**£10+ ($18+)**
CPC 664	**£90+ ($165+)**
CPC 6128	**£25+ ($46+)**
GX4000	**£50+ ($92+)**

APPLE

APPLE II	**£30+ ($55+)**

ATARI

400/800/600XL/XE	**£20+ ($37+)**
2600 (VCS)	**£20+ ($37+)**
5200	**£30 ($55)**
7800	**£20+ ($37+)**
JAGUAR	**£20+ ($37+)**
JAGUAR CD	**£70 ($129)**
LYNX I/II	**£20+ ($37+)**
ST	**£20+ ($37+)**

BANDAI

GUNDAM RX-78	**£75+ ($138+)**
PLAYDIA	**£90 ($166)**
PIPPIN (ATMARK)	**£500+ ($921+)**
WONDERSWAN	**£10 ($18)**
WONDERSWAN COLOR	**£20 ($37)**
WONDERSWAN CRYSTAL	**£25 ($46)**



COMMODORE

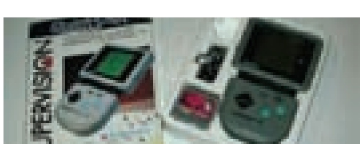
AMIGA 500/600/1200	**£20+ ($37+)**
C16/PLUS/4	**£15+ ($28+)**
C64	**£10+ ($18+)**
C64 GS	**£30+ ($55+)**
C128	**£30+ ($55+)**
CDTV	**£20 ($37)**
CD32	**£25 ($46)**
VIC-20	**£10+ ($18+)**

FUJITSU

FUJITSU FM	**£100+ ($184+)**
FUJITSU FM TOWNS MARTY	**£200+ ($368+)**



MISCELLANEOUS



BALLY ASTROCADE	**£20 ($37)**
BARCODE BATTLER	**£5 ($18)**
CASIO LOOPY	**£25 ($46)**
FAIRCHILD CHANNEL F	**£10 ($18)**
COLECOVISION	**£30 ($55)**
DRAGON 32/64	**£8 ($15)**
ARCADIA 2001	**£10 ($18)**
EPOCH CASSETTE VISION	**£20 ($37)**
EPOCH SUPER CASSETTE VISION	**£30 ($55)**
INTELLIVISION	**£40+ ($74+)**
ODYSSEY	**£10 ($18)**
ORIC-1	**£20 ($37)**
PLAYSTATION	**£10 ($18)**
SAM COUPÉ	**£50-£200 ($92-$368)**
SUPERVISION	**£15 ($28)**
TIGER ELEC GAME.COM	**£15 ($28)**
TOMY TUTOR (MK1/JR/MK2)	**£10 ($18)**
VECTREX (MB/GCE)	**£80 ($147)**
X68000	**£90+ ($166+)**

MSX

MSX 1	**£10+ ($18+)**
MSX 2	**£20+ ($37+)**
MSX 2+	**£30+ ($55+)**
MSX TURBO R	**£30+ ($55+)**

NEC

PC-6###	**£10+ ($18+)**

RETRO AUCTION WATCH

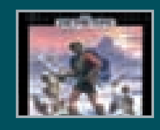
Retro Gamer sifts through the pages of eBay to report back on any items of interest (hardware or software) that have caught our eyes. This month we've been looking for Shining Force games…



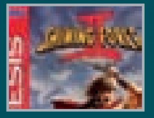
SHINING FORCE GAIDEN
System: **Game Gear**
Normally sells for **£30**
Ended at **£31.46**



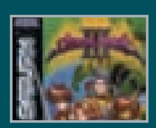
SHINING FORCE NEO
System: **PS2**
Normally sells for **£18**
Ended at **£24.62**



SHINING FORCE
System: **Mega Drive**
Normally sells for **£11**
Ended at **£14.56**



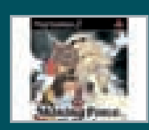
SHINING FORCE II
System: **Mega Drive**
Normally sells for **£10**
Ended at **£15.47**



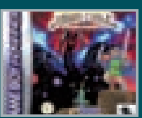
SHINING FORCE III
System: **Saturn**
Normally sells for **£32**
Ended at **£27.46**



SHINING FORCE CD
System: **Mega-CD**
Normally sells for **£24**
Ended at **£12.89**



SHINING FORCE EXA
System: **PS2**
Normally sells for **£25**
Ended at **£31.53**



RESURRECTION OF THE DARK DRAGON
System: **GBA**
Normally sells for **£15**
Ended at **£12.11**

PC-8801	£20 ($37)
PC-9801	£35 ($65)
PC-FX	£50 ($92)
PC-ENGINE	£55 ($101)
PC-ENGINE GT	£70+ ($129+)
TURBOGRAFX-16	£30 ($55)
TURBO EXPRESS	£50 ($92)
SUPERGRAFX	£80 ($147)
PC-E CD-ROM/ TURBOGRAFX CD	£50+ ($92+)
PC-E DUO/ TURBO DUO	£120 ($221)
DUO-R	£80 ($147)

NINTENDO

FAMICOM	£60 ($111)
FAMICOM AV	£40 ($74)
FAMICOM DISK SYSTEM	£70 ($129)
SHARP FAMICOM TWIN	£100 ($184)
GAME & WATCH	£1+ ($2+)
GAME BOY B/W	£5 ($9)
GAME BOY POCKET	£8 ($15)
GAME BOY COLOR	£12 ($22)
GAME BOY ADVANCE	£25 ($46)
N64	£10 ($18)
N64 DD	£150+ ($276+)
NES (TOASTER)	£15 ($28)
NES (DOG BONE)	£50 ($92)
SNES (SUPER FAMICOM IN JAPAN)	£20 ($37)
SNES 2 (KNOWN AS 'JR' IN JAPAN)	£50+ ($92+)
VIRTUAL BOY	£80 ($147)



PHILIPS

CD-I	£20+ ($37+)
CD-I 450/500	£30 ($55)
VIDEOPAC G7000	£10 ($18)
VIDEOPAC G7400	£20 ($37)

SEGA

32X	£35 ($65)
DREAMCAST	£25 ($46)
GAME GEAR	£15 ($28)
SG-1000	£50-£150 ($80-$260)
SC-3000	£50 ($92)
MASTER SYSTEM I/II	£10 ($18)
AMSTRAD MEGA PC	£10 ($18)
TERADRIVE	£100 ($184)
MEGA DRIVE/ GENESIS I/II	£25 ($46)
GENESIS 3	£35 ($65)
NOMAD	£100 ($184)
MULTIMEGA/ WONDERMEGA/ CDX/X'EYE	£100+ ($184+)
MEGA-CD (SCD) I/II	£50+ ($92+)
PICO	£20 ($37)
SATURN	£30 ($55)
MEGA CD (SCD) I/II	£50+ ($92+)

SINCLAIR

ZX80	£200 ($368)
ZX81	£70 ($129)
ZX SPECTRUM 48K	£10 ($18)
ZX SPECTRUM 128K	£40 ($74)
ZX SPECTRUM+	£35 ($65)
ZX SPECTRUM +2	£35 ($65)
ZX SPECTRUM +3	£40 ($74)

SNK

NEO-GEO AES	£150+ ($276+)
NEO-GEO MVS	£70 ($129)
NEO-GEO CD	£100 ($184)
NEO-GEO CDZ	£80+ ($147+)
NEO-GEO POCKET	£20 ($37)
NEO-GEO POCKET COLOR	£35 ($65)

COLLECTOR'S CORNER

THIS MONTH, SPECTRUMANIAC **ALBERT VALLS** SHOWS OFF HIS SHRINE TO SIR CLIVE SINCLAIR. IT REALLY IS IMPRESSIVE STUFF

» I'm Albert Valls from Spain. I've studied music for about a decade, but this title doesn't tell the real truth about my playing skills!

» There's no point in just admiring the man and his achievements without a faithful knowledge of his major failures as well. I've never felt Sinclair should be put as an idol.

» RetroAccion organised a huge Sinclair museum in 2007 during the RetroEuskal event in Bilbao. The last day we decided to "get the most out of the Sinclair products".

» I've had the opportunity to meet other Sinclair software collectors. For me, I haven't focused on any of the company's particular models, I just collect them all.

» I don't just collect computers and peripherals, I've amassed all kinds of Sinclair technology, including calculators, multimeters, radios, hi-fis and televisions.

If you have a collection that you feel the rest of the **Retro Gamer** readership needs to know about then contact us at retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk and we'll do our best to get you in the magazine.

BACK TO THE EIGHTIES

THE LATEST NEWS FROM SEPTEMBER 1985

SEPTEMBER 1985 – QL tumbles, Nightshade arrives, Mikro-Gen's Unicorn appears, two thirds of the Siege Of Earth doesn't and Amstrad Action and Amtix! go into battle. Richard Burton loads up Roland In Time and waits…

» One of the many MSX machines that faired poorly in the UK, the Toshiba HX-10, down in price… again…

Sinclair's QL was savagely reduced in price from £399.95 to £199.95. The official line for the reduction was that manufacturing costs had also been cut considerably, with the savings being passed on to the consumer. It could also be that QL sales were very poor and Sinclair had some big money woes to work through. The company owed £15 million to various creditors although an agreement between all parties was reached later in the month.

However, things weren't all doom and gloom for Sir Clive. The much anticipated Spectrum 128 was finally launched… but only in Spain. However, it would finally arrive in the UK in February 1986.

The new machine featured a three-channel sound chip and an imposing heat sink that looked not unlike a toast rack. There was also a separate numeric keyboard that came with the Spanish machine, but that didn't make it across the Channel for inclusion in the UK bundle.

Commodore finally bit the bullet and started flogging its dead horse off cheaply. The Plus/4 micro was being bundled with the data recorder and a collection of games for just £99.

The equally average MSX machine, Toshiba's HX-10, was also reduced to the same price. And to complete a trio of dodgy micros with plummeting prices, the Memotech MTX500 was cut to £79.95.



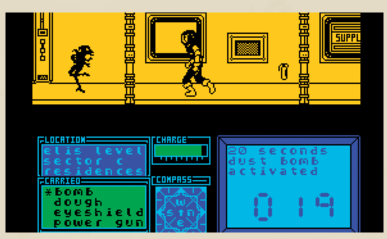
» Newsfield introduced *Amtix!* to CPC owners while Future also prepared its debut magazine, *Amstrad Action*. Let battle commence.

Ultimate's latest offering to dazzle gamers was *Nightshade*. This was the first game from Ultimate to make use of its much vaunted Filmation II engine, which allowed for more wandering and exploration, as it permitted scrolling environments rather than the static room-based games of *Knight Lore* and *Alien 8*.

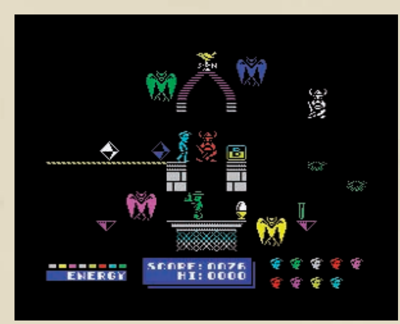
Although the graphics and the wonderfully developed Gothic town you wander around were superbly detailed, the free-roaming element actually made the game more simplistic with lots of shooting and less puzzles.

Nightshade cost a meaty £9.95 for the Spectrum with conversions appearing later on the Amstrad, BBC, C64 and on the MSX twice, in the UK on cassette and in Japan on ROM cartridge in association with Dexter Soft. It would also be letting Sir Arthur Pendragon out for a third outing on the C64 in *Blackwyche*.

Flicking the Vs, *V For Vendetta* – they're all quality Vs, but none was quite as good as the sci-fi TV extravaganza of *V*. Ocean had cunningly managed to snaffle the licence for a *V* game, which would see the lizardy aliens and the resistance battling it out. Diana scoffing guinea pigs not included… Ocean planned to get the project finished in time for a Christmas release on C64, Spectrum and Amstrad. It didn't. It eventually appeared mid-1986 and was disappointing.



» *Marsport* (Spectrum): A trilogy of one. Not great. *Fornax* and *Gath* unreleased. Not good either. Where are they?!



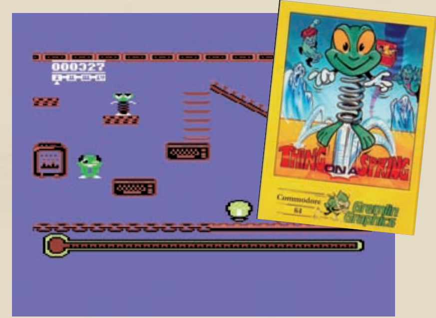
» *Dynamite Dan* (Spectrum): Ultra colourful and a frenzy of sound effects, Rod Bowkett's great platformer was very impressive.

Mikro-Gen had seemingly succeeded where Imagine Software and its mythical megagames failed. Its new release for the Spectrum, *Shadow Of The Unicorn*, was part of the new Mikro Plus range of games that would include an interface giving an extra 16K of ROM for a bigger, better game.

It was also priced at just £14.95 rather than the scary £40-plus Imagine was threatening to value its megagames at. It was officially released on 17 September and although it was well executed and lavishly packaged, it never really grabbed gamers' attention and only achieved average sales. Future proposed Mikro Plus games, *Battle Of The Planets* and *Three Weeks In Paradise* were reworked and downgraded to a standard cassette release, with the Mikro Plus format and label shelved after just one release.



» *Finders Keepers* (C64): One of Mastertronic's first releases was also one of its best featuring the debut of the Magic Knight.



» *Thing On A Spring* (C64): A fun but frustratingly testing game enhanced by Rob Hubbard's fantastic musical score.

THIS MONTH IN... CHARTS

1985

SEPTEMBER NEWS

On 1 September, the legendary RMS Titanic was finally located at the bottom of the Atlantic Ocean, approximately 370 miles from Newfoundland, by a French/American exploration team.

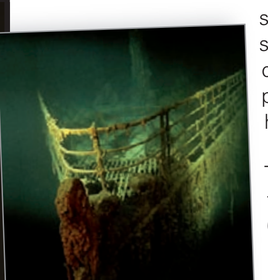
The ship was found 2.5 miles down on the sea bed. It had been popular belief that the Titanic sank in one piece after hitting an iceberg. However, it was found to have snapped into two, with the stern found almost 2,000 feet away from the bow.

The bow and stern were found to be facing in opposite directions with a debris field of one square mile surrounding the ship's sections, containing items such as personal possessions and crockery. On 4 September the first pictures of the wreck were shown to the world, revealing the huge boilers and the instantly recognisable bow.

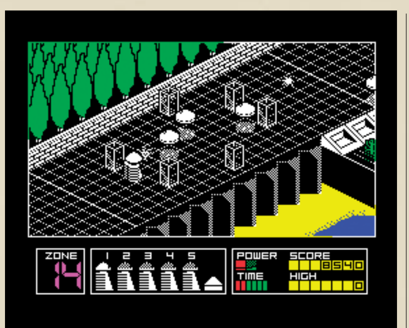
On 19 September a 7.8 magnitude earthquake hit Mexico. The next day an aftershock of similar strength compounded the situation, leaving over 10,000 dead, 30,000 injured and 6,000 buildings flattened.

Topping the movie charts in the USA during September was *Back To The Future* starring Michael J Fox, who was enjoying double success with *Teen Wolf*, which was firmly rooted in second place throughout the month.

» Combing all that hair every day was a real bitch, but at least Michael J Fox looked good on the basketball court.



» The bow of the Titanic; imposing in 1912 and still mightily impressive 96 years later.



» *Highway Encounter* (Spectrum): Costa Panayi's crisp graphics shone through in this slick isometric shooter with puzzle elements.

Amstrad and Spectrum owners were in for a graphic adventure treat over the coming months, with Gargoyle Games promising to release its *Siege Of Earth* trilogy. It would take the familiar style of its recent releases, *Tir Na Nog* and *Dun Darach*, with the first of the three, *Marsport*, hitting shops in September. Although *Marsport* looked visually similar to the other games, the adventuring element was different and the game became a big hit for Gargoyle. With two more games to come – *Fornax* due in January and *Gath* in April – the company looked to have a positive future and a healthy bank balance ahead of it. Strangely both these titles never appeared…



» *Shadow Of The Unicorn* (Spectrum): Sadly the first and last Mikro Plus game with the added grunt of a 16K ROM.

Future Publishing proudly announced that its first magazine, a new monthly title for Amstrad CPC owners, would be available from next month. *Amstrad Action* would be firmly camped in gaming territory and proved to be the perfect foil to the rather stuffy *Amstrad Computer User*… but it had competition…

Newsfield Publications, home of *Zzap!* and *Crash*, announced it would also be introducing its own Amstrad-specific magazine, entitled *Amtix!*, to the public at the Personal Computer World Show in London with a special preview issue zero copy of the magazine.

Computer & Video Games had a strong selection of gaming delicacies to tuck into this month with *Elite* (Firebird, C64) edging out its competitors for the Game Of The Month title. Not far behind were *Beach Head II* (US Gold, C64), *Spy Vs Spy* (Beyond, Spectrum), *Dynamite Dan* (Mirrorsoft, Spectrum), *Highway Encounter* (Vortex, Spectrum), *Thing On A Spring* (Gremlin Graphics, C64) and *Hyper Sports* (Imagine, Spectrum).

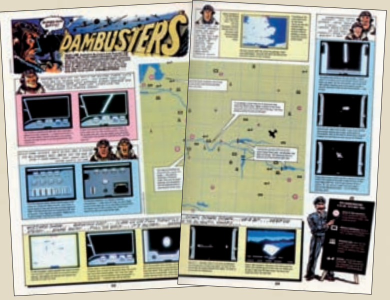
Zzap!64 pinned its Gold Medal award to both *Summer Games II* (US Gold/Epyx) and *Frankie Goes To Hollywood* (Ocean), followed up by a trio of Zzap Sizzlers for *Finders Keepers* (Mastertronic), *Skyfox* (Ariolasoft) and *Rescue On Fractalus!* (Activision).

Meanwhile, *Crash* magazine was Smashing *Monty On The Run* (Gremlin Graphics), *Popeye* (dk'Tronics), *On The Run* (Design Design), *Red Moon* (Level 9) and *Highway Encounter* (Vortex).

YOUR SPECTRUM



I say, Squadron Leader Squiffy, chocks away lads, time to give old Jerry what for. Take her up and give it some welly, bank right, level off, bombs away chaps! What an absolute corker… Yep, *Dambusters* by US Gold was *Your Spectrum*'s Megagame for the month.



AMSTRAD COMPUTER USER

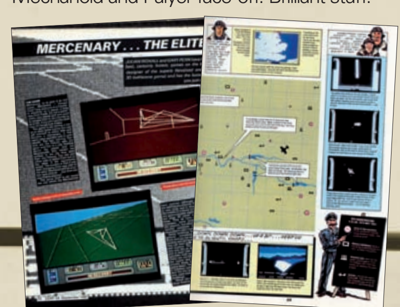
Come up to the lab and see what's on the slab. For *ACU* it was *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* by CRL as it picked up the Game Of The Month accolade. You get to play as either Brad or Janet in attempting to bring together all the pieces of the De Medusa Machine.



ZZAP!



Among the Gold Medals and Sizzlers lurked one quiet unassuming game preview. *Mercenary* by Novagen and Paul Woakes was about to stun everyone. The vector graphics were remarkable but were almost taken for granted as you immersed yourself on the planet of Targ for the Mechanoid and Palyer face-off. Brilliant stuff.



SEPTEMBER 1985

MUSIC

1. Dancing In The Street (Mick Jagger & David Bowie)
2. Holding Out For A Hero (Bonnie Tyler)
3. Tarzan Boy (Baltimora)
4. I Got You Babe (UB40 & Chrissie Hynde)
5. Part-Time Lover (Stevie Wonder)

SPECTRUM

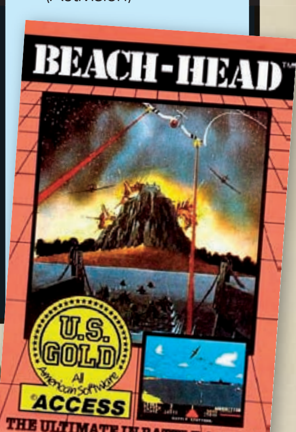
1. Hyper Sports (Imagine)
2. Rocco (Gremlin Graphics)
3. Softaid (Various)
4. Cauldron (Palace Software)
5. Jet Set Willy II (Software Projects)

COMMODORE 64

1. The Way Of The Exploding First (Melbourne House)
2. Elite (Firebird)
3. Softaid (Various)
4. Pitstop II (US Gold/ Epyx)
5. International Tennis (Commodore)

AMSTRAD

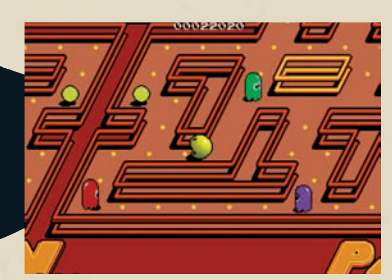
1. Beach Head (US Gold)
2. 3D Starstrike (Realtime)
3. Daley Thompson's Decathlon (Ocean)
4. Knight Lore (Ultimate)
5. Ghostbusters (Activision)



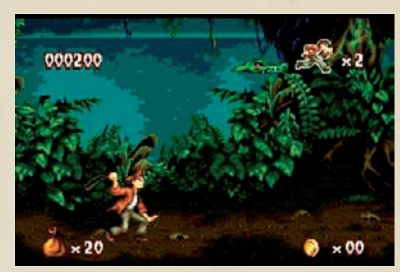
BACK TO THE NINETIES

THE LATEST NEWS FROM MAY 1991

MAY 1991 – retro games coming back, Palace sold, Activision merged, new Pitfall promised, the Blues Brothers are on a mission from God, James Pond 2 is on a mission from cod and Dirty Harry (not Debbie unfortunately) gets released. Richard Burton goes Atomic…



» *Pac-Mania* (Amiga): Something old, new, borrowed, and… yellow. *Pac-Man* gets updated and is a triumph.



» *Pitfall: The Mayan Adventure* (Jaguar): The remake of a classic game for the Jaguar. Excellent graphically but dull gameplay.



» *The Blues Brothers* (Amiga): Pretty standard platforming fare, although it comes into its own as a two-player game.

Domark was obviously way ahead of its time back in 1991. Its latest arcade conversion of *Super Space Invaders '91* was squarely aimed at old-school retro gamers. The game itself added new backgrounds to prettify proceedings and enhanced graphics to make you think there had been some effort put into the conversion. Essentially it was just the same old story with a new lick of paint. Does that make today's retro gamers who play *Super Space Invaders '91*, retro retro gamers?

Thankfully, Domark looked to have a better offering on the horizon with news of a Sega Master System release of *Prince Of Persia*.

Another classic game getting a modern overhaul was the newly released *Mega Phoenix* by Dinamic Software. Again, there was lots of shooting, fancy-pants backgrounds but very little else to get excited about. Not something that Amiga, ST and PC owners would start queuing around the block for.

And there was yet further retro gaming re-imagining with the Master System getting a conversion of *Pac-Mania*, the isometric version of *Pac-Man*. Thankfully it turned out rather well with some cute graphics and a new-found jumping ability for Pac-Man.

US Gold also had arcade conversion news, with the acquisition of two new licences to produce *Alien Storm* and *G-LOC* on a variety of 8-bit, 16-bit and console systems.

Alien Storm was a scrolling shoot-'em-up that turned out to be very ropey on the 16-bit machines but much better on lowly 8-bits. *G-LOC* was an *After Burner*-style game that was a hit in the arcades, more for the breakfast-launching R360 rotating cabinet, than the game itself. Without the backup of said cabinet the home computer versions suffered from a distinct lack of excitement. Again, the 8-bit versions seemed to fare better in the gaming press than the 16-bit efforts.

It may only be 106 miles to Chicago and they may indeed be on a mission from God, but the Blues Brothers, with a little help from the programmers at Titus, were being converted to Amiga and Atari ST for a platform game based on the hit 1980 film starring John Belushi and Dan Aykroyd. Titus envisaged the game would be done and dusted just in time for Christmas… dry white toast not included…

The parent company of Titus, Leisure Holding, announced it had bought Palace Software who had been responsible for *Cauldron* and *Barbarian* across a swathe of various platforms during the mid-Eighties.

While Titus went on to produce some great projects like *Prehistorik* and *Titus The Fox*, Palace seemed to fade into the background with barely any output after the takeover. Presumably Titus was the favoured label as *Super Cauldron*, based on Palace's original concept, was released on the Titus label a few years later.

Former software giant Activision was itself taken over, with news that The Disc Company had acquired, reorganised and merged the company. Mediagenic, Activision's real name outside the videogames arena, had failed dismally in attempting to turn the company around, with its decision to get involved in areas other than gaming proving to be the final nail in the coffin. Changing its well-known, instantly identifiable name to something rather bland and unknown couldn't have helped either.

» *Dirty Harry* (NES): Did he fire six shots or only five? It doesn't really matter as this NES game has unlimited ammo…



» *James Pond 2: Codename Robocod* (Amiga): An excellent platform game. Next up: '*James Pond 3 In Golden Haddock*'.

» No, not a Stargate or a UFO crash site – it's the *G-LOC* R360 arcade cabinet. Not available on the Spectrum version though.

THIS MONTH IN… CHARTS

1991

MAY NEWS

On 18 May, Britain's first astronaut launched into space. Helen Sharman took off from Kazakhstan in the Soviet Soyuz TM12 rocket that docked with the Mir Space Station the following day.

Miss Sharman beat 13,000 other hopefuls to become the first Brit into space after hearing an advert on the radio. She applied, won and after 18 months of training took her place in the Project Juno scientific mission. She spent eight days in orbit conducting various medical and agricultural experiments.

» The tragic Stompie Moeketsi, who died from his injuries at the hands of the Mandela 'Football' Club.

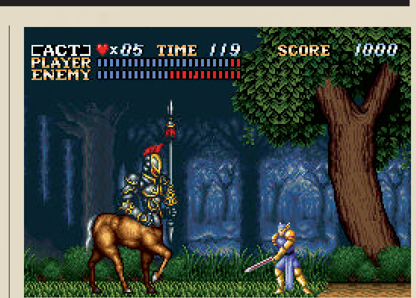
On 14 May Winnie Mandela, wife of Nelson, was jailed for her part in the kidnap of four youths, one of whom, Stompie Moeketsi, later died from his injuries after receiving a beating from one of Mrs Mandela's bodyguards, part of the infamous Mandela Football Club. She was released on bail after an appeal that eventually led to a fine and a suspended two-year prison sentence.

On 21 May Rajiv Gandhi, Prime Minister of India was assassinated by a female Tamil Tiger suicide bomber. He was campaigning for the Congress Party during the election when a bomb hidden in flowers exploded, killing him and 14 others.



» Helen Sharman hoped to be the first to plough the moon and grow some space turnips. Alas it was not to be…

» *Gods* (Amiga): An okay game with some beautiful graphics but let down by awful scrolling and mediocre animation.



» *ActRaiser* (SNES): An interesting blend of side-scrolling slash-'em-up action and strategy, rounded off with lovely graphics.

It filed for bankruptcy and shortly afterwards the Disc Company merger led to the company being renamed as Activision once again, this time focusing solely on videogaming. Further streamlining of the company led to all the UK offices being closed down with European operations being conducted from Paris.

The new Activision also revealed it was planning an updated version of an old Atari classic, *Pitfall*, for the Super NES. Presumably this was a concerted effort to get some profit immediately into the restructured company.

Pitfall: The Mayan Adventure eventually got released in 1994 on the Sega Mega-CD and SNES with further incarnations appearing on the Mega Drive, PC and Atari Jaguar in 1995.

Millennium Interactive was a purveyor of glad tidings with the news that its hit game *James Pond* would be getting a sequel on the Amiga, ST and PC with Sega consoles getting versions, too. *James Pond 2: Codename Robocod* saw your fishy little friend suited and booted in a bionic outfit that allowed for out of water activities. The evil Dr Maybe has taken over the North Pole and filled Santa's Toy Factory with bombs. It's your mission to infiltrate and liberate the factory.

Codename Robocod turned out to be a terrific game, with plenty of hidden extras, bonus levels and end-of-level bosses making for a fun, well-rounded game with humungous levels to negotiate. With tills ringing loudly, it came as no surprise when Millennium let slip plans for *James Pond 3*…

Nintendo finally released its licensed game based on the *Dirty Harry* movie starring Clint Eastwood. So, tell me punk… do you feel lucky? Well do ya? If blasting people with your Magnum .45 is your thing, then this side-scrolling shooter with the merest whiff of a puzzle element could be right down your boulevard. However, it was only available on the NES.

In the reviews sections of the magazines, the Zero Hero awards were given out to *Brat* (Mirrorsoft, Amiga) and *Spellcasting 101: Sorcerers Get All The Girls* (MicroProse, PC) with the re-releases of *Sherman M4* (Action 16, Atari ST) and *North & South* (Action 16, Amiga) also getting the nod. The Console Classics badge of greatness was pinned to *Columns* (Sega, Game Gear) and *Saint Dragon* (Aicom, PC-Engine).

Computer & Video Games liked *ActRaiser* (Enix, Super NES), *Gods* (Renegade, Atari ST), *Eye Of The Beholder* (US Gold, Amiga/PC), *PGA Tour Golf* (Electronic Arts, Mega Drive), *Final Match Tennis* (Human, PC-Engine) and *Ramparts* (Atari, Arcade), with all obtaining the C&VG Hit mark of gaming excellence.

MEAN MACHINES



Sonic The Hedgehog was creating quite a buzz and *Mean Machines* was feeling it, too. Its preview of *Sonic* left gamers gagging for more and the reviewer with a semi. Sonic even made it on to the cover with a bold tagline stating, "Best game ever?" What? Better than naked Twister?



C&VG

The *Snow Bros.*/Ocean France debacle was almost complete. *C&VG* had a preview of it, featuring screenshots and plenty of superlatives. "This could be this year's *Rainbow Islands*," it said boldly. "Just wait for the full review next month." We did… and we're still waiting…



THE ONE: AMIGA



The One ran a feature on *Cyberzone*, a new interactive virtual reality game show hosted by Craig Charles. It was created by Broadsword (of *Knightmare* fame) and the graphics produced by Dimension using its Superscape system. Unfortunately, the show was rubbish.



MAY 1991

AMIGA

1 Lemmings (Psygnosis)
2 S.W.I.V. (Storm)
3 Turrican II (Rainbow Arts)
4 Universal Military Simulator II (Rainbird)
5 MiG-29 (Domark)

ATARI ST

1 Elvira: Mistress Of The Dark (Accolade)
2 Prince Of Persia (Domark/Bröderbund)
3 Speedball (Mirrorsoft)
4 Legend Of Faerghail (Rainbow Arts)
5 Turrican II (Rainbow Arts)

PC

1 Airline Transport Pilot (Sub Logic)
2 Aircraft Scenery Designer (Microsoft)
3 Sim Earth (Ocean/ Maxis)
4 Universal Military Simulator II (Rainbird)
5 Spellcasting 101 (MicroProse)

MUSIC

1 The Shoop Shoop Song (Cher)
2 Last Train To Trancentral (KLF)
3 Gypsy Woman (Crystal Waters)
4 Promise Me (Beverley Craven)
5 Sailing On The Seven Seas (Orchestral Manoeuvres In The Dark)



04



MR PUNIVERSE

A FRANK OPINION FROM CLARANCE



- » **PUBLISHER:** MASTERTRONIC
- » **RELEASED:** 1985
- » **GENRE:** PLATFORMER
- » **FEATURED HARDWARE:** C16
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** £5+



HISTORY

***Mr Puniverse* is one of those nice little Mastertronic games that were around in large numbers during the Eighties – a frustrating platformer where timing is paramount in order to run and jump your character through the game. In this case the delayed control reactions make things all the more difficult. Still, that's half the fun of these retro classics, isn't it? Well, isn't it?**

Anyway, there are 25 rooms to negotiate, with each room containing a vitamin pill that has to be collected. Various obstacles have also been put in your way, with sinking platforms, firing cannons and moving conveyer belts to be overcome. To complicate things further, in some of the rooms your energy bar will slowly decrease, in effect giving you only a certain amount of time to collect the pill, and this can be a real pain once you progress to some of the more complex screens in the game. There is some strategy involved in negotiating the rooms, with more than one exit to most screens meaning that different paths through the game map can be taken, but there are a few nasty shortcuts back to the opening screens if the wrong exit is chosen.

Graphics are fairly basic, with little definition to your character, but the platforms themselves are sharply defined and do the job. The sound is again very simple, with one sound for jumping and another when a life is lost, and no in-game music at all, although there is an annoying tune at the attract screen. As mentioned earlier, the controls (which consist of left, right and jump) are a bit sluggish, but in a very predictable way, so with practice they become almost second nature.

Mr Puniverse is not a classic by any means, but it's far better than a lot of stuff that was churned out for the C16, and it kept me entertained for long enough to justify my £1.99!

One interesting side note – the cassette inlay mentions: "*Mr Puniverse,* importalised [?] on BBC TV's *Late, Late Breakfast Show…*", although I'm not aware if any licensing fee was paid to the BBC, or indeed to Noel Edmonds…

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RETROBATE PROFILE

- » **NAME:** CLARANCE FRANK
- » **JOINED:** 03 SEPT 08
- » **LOCATION:** SKEGNESS
- » **OCCUPATION:** AVOIDING MANAGEMENT
- » **FAV GAMES SYSTEM:** C16, AMIGA, PLAYSTATION, GAME BOY

DEVELOPER LOOKBACK

IF MICROPROSE WAS A GAME, IT WOULD'VE BEEN ONE OF TWO HALVES. SURGING INTO AN EARLY LEAD, THEN HAVING TO FIGHT OFF A LATE ONSLAUGHT. BUT HALF-TIME WAS INCREDIBLE – NOT SO MUCH A TIME TO REST, BUT A POINT AT WHICH TO EXCEL. DAVID CROOKES EXPLAINS, IN PART TWO OF OUR SERIES

MICRO PROSE (PART 2)



Sid Meier, the genius behind some of MicroProse's best games.

Throughout the Eighties, MicroProse had made a name for itself with its highly regarded and commercially successful run of flight simulators. Sid Meier had proved to be something of a dab hand at creating titles such as *Gunship!* and *F-19 Stealth Fighter*, and his MicroProse co-founder Bill Stealey, given his military background, was able to market them effectively.

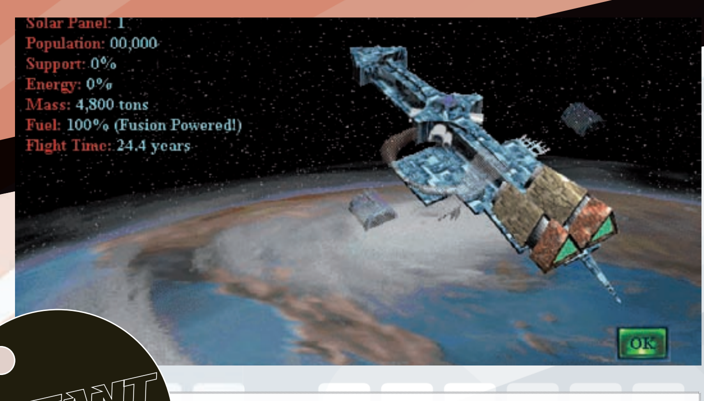
The company had gone from strength to strength, opening up new frontiers outside of the US with one of the most notable studios being based in Tetbury, Gloucestershire. UK titles such as *Stunt Car Racer* and *MicroProse Soccer* cemented the firm's reputation as a software house that traded squarely on quality.

But back in the US, Sid Meier was getting restless. With a desire to dabble in areas other than flight sims, he came up with two killer titles. And while Bill was eager to pull the company in a different direction, the two games took MicroProse to another level, allowing the firm to enter its second era of success.

"I wanted to enter the coin-op arcade market but Sid didn't like it," says Bill. "But I made a decision and we went for it. The first game we made was *F-15 Strike Eagle: The Arcade Game* and we also made a robot fighting game called *B.O.T.T.S.*. But it was tough going into competition with the Japanese, who were dominating the arcade sector. Taking military games and making them work as a coin-op was also costly."

MicroProse sold around 7,000 units of *F-15 Strike Eagle*. It was a huge figure, but it wasn't enough for MicroProse to make enough money from its new venture. The two arcade games weren't attractive enough for punters – their superb 3D graphics failing to compensate for the fact the machines were too different to others on the market at the time.

"It was not a good decision," laments Bill. "It led to a situation where we had to raise



MicroProse's UK art team were a happy bunch. Front row (left to right): Guy Jeffries, Matthew Knott, John Reitze (a miniature), Drew Northcott, Amanda Roberts. Back row (left to right): Andy Cook, Eddie Garnier, Nick Cook (art manager), Greg Shill, Martin Severn, Terry Greer.



Geoff Crammond's Grand Prix 4 was the final game to carry the MicroProse logo.



MicroProse's *Tycoon* series continued with titles such as *RollerCoaster Tycoon*.

INSTANT EXPERT

MicroProse had two labels: MicroPlay in America and MicroStyle in the UK. It allowed the company to diversify and yet keep the MicroProse name.

Bill Stealey was close to Spectrum HoloByte's president Gilman Louie. It helped pave the way for Spectrum HoloByte to snap up MicroProse.

After leaving MicroProse Bill went on to found Interactive Magic, another simulation software company.

MicroProse wanted to produce console games for the Nintendo 64 and PlayStation in 1995, but it didn't have sufficient financial resources.

Geoff Crammond's Grand *Prix 4* was the last-ever game to carry the MicroProse name.

The rights to MicroProse games were eventually transferred to Atari, but in the end Sid Meier acquired them for Firaxis, which he co-founded.

Sid likes to refresh his franchises, hence the development and release of *Sid Meier's Railroads!* in October 2006.

When MicroProse fizzled away, it left a major hole in the serious simulation market.



That's the reason why Bill has gone on to form Thriller Publishing along with other ex-MicroProse top brass, in a bid to breathe life into the genre.

As for the MicroProse name… it was bought by the Interactive Game Group in 2007. MicroProse Systems, as it's now called, sells consumer electronics, power products and game controllers.

money in order for the company to survive." Luckily, Sid's new games helped to keep the firm going and by now MicroProse had gone public. The first of the new crop of titles was *Railroad Tycoon*, a business sim in which players built and managed a railway company in America, England or Europe, creating a line within a scheduled time, complete with track, stations, trains and a full timetable. It wasn't long before the game was being heralded as a classic and one of 1990's best, but, more than that, it gave Sid a chance to branch into a fresh area of gaming.

He had the idea of taking simple systems and weaving them together to create a more complex whole. "There was operating the railroad, playing the stock market, building track," explains Sid. "It was like different things that individually are pretty simple and easy to understand and easy to get into, that when they interact, create an interesting kind of complexity."

Sid worked on the game with Bruce Shelley, who had previously worked for board-game maker Avalon Hill. Bruce and Sid formed a great team, made all the better for Bruce's love of railroads. He would spend hours discovering facts and giving Sid feedback. And it was through honing the system used in *Railroad Tycoon* – and because a sequel to that game was canned – that Sid was able to embark on what some would say was his landmark title: *Civilization*, published in 1991.

This turn-based strategy game saw players flung back to 4,000 BC, employing a fair deal of micromanagement as they attempted to build a dominant empire. Again, it was a complex welding of simple systems. But more importantly for MicroProse, it won scores of awards, sold bucket loads, and helped to keep the company's financial head above water, for a couple more years at least.

Civilization had special challenges for MicroProse. Sid had sprung *Civilization* on Bill after he had spent considerable time on the product. The testers liked it, and Bill enjoyed the decision making. Being a board-game player, he thought it would be a nice addition to MicroProse's title list. But when MicroProse launched the title, it did not do well.

"It seems everyone needed Sid to give them a few hints to get going," explains Bill. "So *Civilization* was brought back in-house and the development team decided that they needed to put Sid in the box to give hints on how to get started. That is how the advisors got into the game. The design tried to put 'Sid in the box' to give you tips." *Civilization* was reshipped and from there the game took off.

Civilization was timely for MicroProse. Will Wright had created *SimCity* in 1989, a game much admired by Sid and from which he gathered some of *Civilization*'s design ideas. With *SimCity* having rode high in the charts, Sid was convinced his game would also do well. "The creative spark behind *Civilization* was my love of history," Sid explains. "It's such a robust and fascinating subject."

One small problem, however, was that *Civilization* was really a board game created by Avalon Hill. Bill had no idea of this until the Avalon Hill CEO called and threatened to sue MicroProse, so Bill decided that it should share the spoils and offered to put a coupon in every *Civilization* game to sell a board game from Avalon Hill. Avalon Hill's CEO agreed… although it wasn't the end of the matter when it came to *Civilization* ownership rights.

The approach to making games at MicroProse was very different to the way many developers tackle new projects today. Although *Civilization* came out at a perfect time, it wasn't deliberate. Sid would simply look for a gaming topic, be it a train or a pirate, and create something around it. Experimentation was the most important thing and it was possible because hundreds of thousands of dollars didn't need to be thrown at the games in order to get them to the standards of their peers.

Still, even though *Civilization* was widely regarded by the developers as a smash

THRILLER



Bill Stealey is now set for a return to videogaming following the setting up of Thriller Publishing. He is joined by all of the executives from the early days of MicroProse (with the exception of Sid Meier).

The company will focus exclusively on MMOs, producing military and espionage-themed games in the first-person shooter, action-adventure, strategy and simulation game genres.

While Bill wants Thriller's games to appear on consoles, the core format is set to be the PC.

"We have so much experience of gaming," says Bill. "We were creating games that fit into as little as 64 kilobytes of space. For us, it's about simple, elegant design that can entertain, but harnessing the benefit of technology today."



Sid Meier's Railroads! was released in 2006. You can never shunt a good game off the tracks, it seems.

hit game, the management was not so sure. The firm held back on the game and pumped little cash into its marketing. Promotion was via word of mouth but it soon took off and not only was the management surprised but Sid was, too. He knew it would sell but he didn't think it would start being spoken of as one of the best PC games ever made.

At the same time, MicroProse's UK division had released Geoff Crammond's *Formula One Grand Prix* on the Amiga and Atari ST, with a PC version following. Gamers adored this racing simulation, loving the attention to detail, the 'real world' physics and the accurately modelled tracks. The only downside to the game was the significant slowdown when the screen became too busy but it didn't stop shoppers racing away with it.

MicroProse went public on the American NASDAQ market in October 1991. MicroProse raised a lot of money, paid off all its old debt, and embarked on an ambitious expansion plan. The company also got an outside board of directors who pushed MicroProse into developing a plan to really grow the firm. Plans were made to double the size of MicroProse within three years.

"But the problem is, you can spend the development money but you may not come up with the right products to make a real hit or a significant profit," says Bill. "MicroProse had to find a way to break out of just military games and the occasional one-off brilliance of Sid and his various project ideas, to reach the kinds of growth the board wanted."

Being public also meant MicroProse had to announce earnings every 90 days, which put significant pressure on everyone in the company and sometimes lessened the ability to spend time on creativity. And yet MicroProse didn't take its eye off military flight sims. Indeed, in 1992, it acquired Leeds-based flight sim developer Vektor Grafix, who created the MicroProse-released flight sim *B-17 Flying Fortress*.

The firm was proving to be the place to be for creative programmers and artists, and Bill was beginning to build a gaming empire. But it was starting to move too fast and doing too much, too soon. There were signs of spiritual and financial decay at MicroProse.

In 1992, MicroProse spent a fortune creating an adventure game engine. One game was released using the new system and MicroProse also tried to do a more classic RPG game with *Darklands*. Yet neither really paid for the development of the two systems. It was another costly mistake and one that led, a year later, to Bill putting the company up for sale.

"Being a public company made a big difference to the way we worked," says Bill. "It was a good decision and it had put the firm back on track but we didn't always get on with the board members and we also had to define a game's release schedule, produce quarterly results and so on. And in 1992 we had issues – there we were with 500 employees and too few games. I'm a firm capitalist and I believe incentives have to be aligned with accomplishment. When we began, we had a process that said we'd double or triple pay cheques if the workers met targets but it was hard to do that as a public firm."

In 1992, MicroProse hired a president for the US side of the business and had a managing director for the European side. Bill moved to be chairman of the board and actually spent little time at the

THE MYSTERY GAME

MICROPROSE®

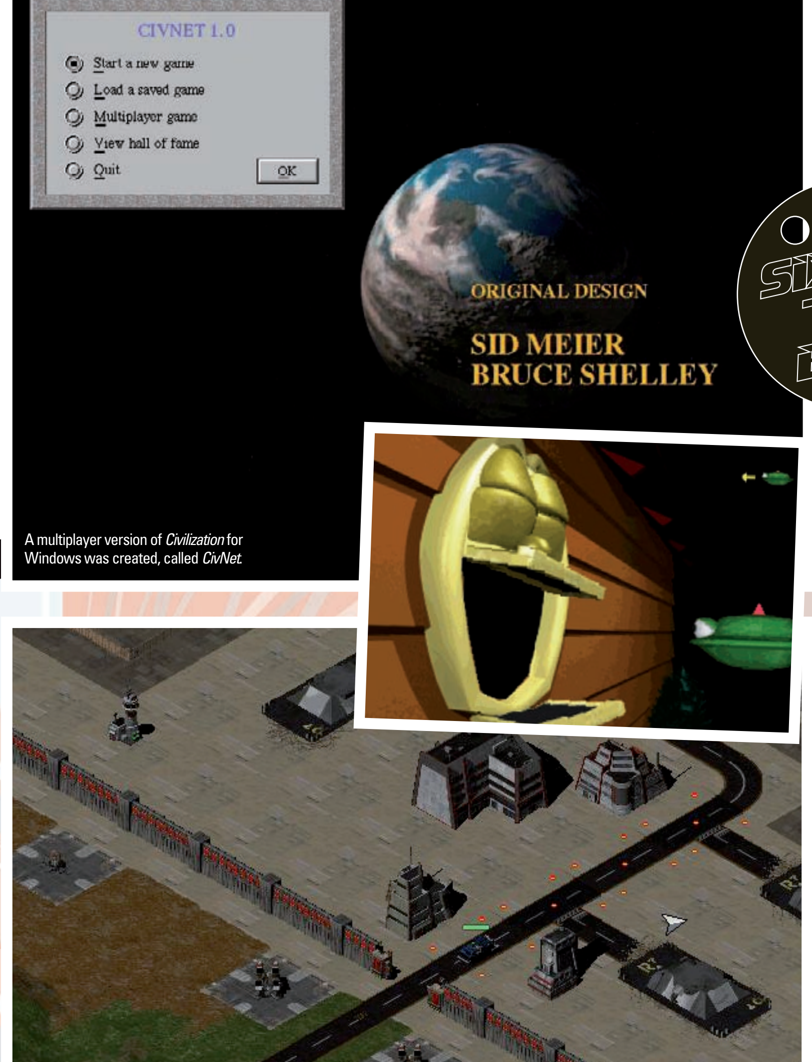
There was a famous story that spread around videogame development in the mid-Nineties. Legend has it that a certain, inexperienced but high-ranking financial manager at MicroProse was wandering around the corridors one day when he caught sight of something new and fascinating on a developer's monitor. The screen showed an array of multicoloured squares appearing and disappearing in hypnotic, organic patterns. The executive walked up behind the developer and stood, bewitched by the fascinating site on the screen.

Andy Cook picks up the story: "After some time, and not able to contain himself any longer, he asked the developer, 'That looks absolutely amazing. What game is it?'

"The developer, who was engrossed in a design document at the time, looked up, confused. 'Huh? What game?' he asked.

"The executive pointed to the screen of moving, coloured blobs. 'That. What game are you working on, it looks fantastic?'

"The developer looked at his screen, turned to the suit and said 'That's not a game. I'm defragmenting my hard drive'."



A multiplayer version of *Civilization* for Windows was created, called *CivNet*.

More third-party developers were brought on board towards the end of MicroProse's life. FASA Studio created *MechCommander*.

company during 1992 at the request of the board, to give the other executives some room to manoeuvre.

When Bill returned in September 1992, he found the plans he had left in April – for ten releases in the autumn of 1992 – were all late. The new management had changed the incentive plan to overtime over bonuses. Everyone wanted the overtime and had no real bonuses awarded for completing projects. In 1992, the company only released *F-15 Strike Eagle III* in December. Bill says it was hard to fund a big company on one significant release.

Bill, after firing MicroProse's US president, went out to find financing for the company. He found it from GE Capital in April 1993. But the funding fell through at the last minute due to some inventory accounting errors that scared GE away. Bill was very concerned as the cash was growing smaller by the payroll. Something had to be done and a buyer was sought. At the time three groups wanted control of MicroProse – one of which was Spectrum HoloByte, funded by Kleiner Perkins, a famous venture capital company on the American West Coast. Bill had kept Spectrum HoloByte alive in 1991 when Robert Maxwell, who owned Spectrum, fell off his boat and left the firm without any money. He had sent HoloByte boss Gilman Louie $400,000 following a phone conversation, in a deal that promised MicroProse could ship *Falcon 3.0* in Europe in 1992. So, because of the relationship the two men had built up, Bill chose Spectrum and he left the company after signing over the papers on 21 June 1993.

Spectrum was then in charge of MicroProse and it decided cuts were needed in order to stay afloat. Two offices in the north of England were closed and more than 40 head office staff were made redundant. Bill went on to found Interactive Magic, a company which, like MicroProse, specialised in simulation software.

Sid Meier continued to work for MicroProse and the company began to pick itself up. *UFO: Enemy Unknown* was released on 31 December 1993 and it was so well received it was once named the best PC game ever made. Licences also came thick and fast – *Magic: The Gathering*, *Top Gun* and *Star Trek: The Next Generation* – with Sid also creating the brilliant *Colonization* in 1994.

"The UK arm was still going well, too," says former MicroProse artist Andy Cook. "When I was interviewed for a job there, I was asked which artists had most influenced me and I replied, 'Rembrandt, Vermeer and Tony Hart.' The only thing I would change about that answer now, is probably the order."

Although MicroProse in America was losing money, the UK arm was making a profit. For the majority of the Nineties, MicroProse UK was housed in a two storey 'L' shaped building situated next to a quarry in Chipping Sodbury. One 'arm' of the 'L' housed the developers, while the other arm was taken up with various other departments such as marketing, finance, QA and so on.

"At the extreme end of the development arm was the art room," says Andy. "All the artists were housed here and it was a fantastic place to work. Music blared out and the lights were kept at the favoured dim levels – the last thing an artist wants are light reflections obscuring his work on screen. Artists would wander around the room when they were rendering something and see what everyone else was working on. The room had a great atmosphere with opinions being sought and given, tips freely

SIX OF THE BEST



Railroad Tycoon

Complex and challenging, *Railroad Tycoon* is one of Sid Meier's best games. Giving you the option of building tracks in America and Europe, there's even a chance to go back to 19th Century England to create a pre-British Rail line free of leaves and signal faults. It gets progressively tougher but there's loads to keep gamers occupied, battling against and disrupting rivals.



Civilization

Civilization is a wonderfully implemented, huge, turn-based strategy game that throws you back to 4,000 BC and asks you to create an empire that can survive through to the modern day and beyond, tackling war, embracing new technologies and engaging in diplomacy. A videogame version of *Civilization* had been tried twice before but failed to be released. Sid triumphed in every way with *Civilization*.



Colonization

Take *Railroad Tycoon* and fuse it with *Civilization* and you get *Colonization*. And while you could accuse Sid of cashing in on his two greatest successes, there's a lot to be said for the ambition of this title. The aim was to build an empire by taking over rivals. It was hard to play in bite-sized chunks as it was a textured game of great depth and incredibly immersive, too.



Formula One Grand Prix

This is one of the best racing games ever made. Many people gave this a spin on the Amiga and it was a standout title for motorsport fans. Then again, when you consider that Geoff Crammond was behind it, it comes as little surprise. Care was taken to get the handling and physics just right. As a nice touch you could modify team and driver names for authenticity.



Magic: The Gathering

Based on the card game, *Magic: The Gathering* was by no means simple. Get the strategies and tactics under your belt and it became an engrossing experience. It was good in single-player, tournament, multiplayer or duel. It's also worth pointing out that it was Sid Meier's last-ever game for MicroProse. Following the end of this project he founded Firaxis Games.



X-COM: UFO Defense

X-COM: UFO Defense is a key player in strategy game evolution. As commander of a group aimed at heading off an alien invasion, you had to manage your resources and do battle against enemy ships, all the while gaining greater intelligence about the enemy. The word 'immersive' is often used in gaming, with *X-COM*, though, it almost defined it.

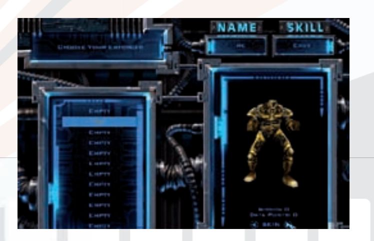
DEVELOPER LOOKBACK

FOUR TO MISS



Falcon 4.0

Five years in development and still *Falcon 4.0* was a disappointment. Sadly flawed despite showing signs of brilliance and with some unforgivable bugs that half a decade of care and attention should have ironed out, it was full of detail (a 600-page manual, no less). But the sheer promise of something great just didn't materialise and it was a case of waiting for patches in order to bring it up to scratch. In fact, it was so bugged that the team worked on fixing them for months afterwards.



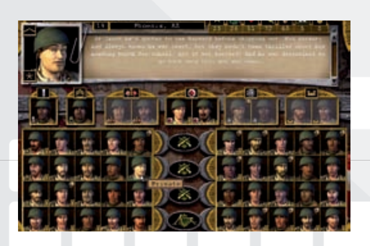
X-COM: Enforcer

More than 30 levels. Action that is thick and fast. A game that drew on the influence of *X-COM: UFO Defense*. So, a game that must have been a tip-top tactical combat title then? Alas, no. Take the suspense out of *X-COM* and this is what you're left with. It's a game that bears very little resemblance to the 1993 classic – too easy, too simple and too fiddly at times. Being able to carry one weapon at a time is a real bind. It's one to avoid, for sure.



Starship Troopers: Terran Ascendancy

Funnily enough, MicroProse's poorer games came towards the end of the company's life span. *Starship Troopers* was one of the worst – a 3D strategy game lacking in variation and any way of making complex moves in a bid to annihilate the arachnid enemy. Camera problems make the gameplay a tad more difficult and, while there are fun elements to the title (the maps are cool), the visuals are often rough and the campaign too narrow for it to be worth dragging out.



Squad Leader

Squad Leader – in which you led British, German or US soldiers through a variety of missions – shares a name with a tabletop wargame by Avalon Hill, but other than that the two are very different. Set during World War II, this turn-based game is neither complex nor modern – even back then it seemed rather dated, using a square movement grid. One to avoid? You betcha. The standard of the latter-day MicroProse games really did sour the memory of a once-great developer.





Andy Cook explains: "One of the artists, Justin Horton, was away for a few days. Someone picked something off the floor nearby and parked it on his desk just to get it out of the way. As time went on, all the artists would add a bit here and there until it looked like this…"

offered and it was an extremely happy and creative place to work. The lunchtime and after-work *Doom* and *Quake* sessions were raucous and enjoyable occasions."

He said the mood changed following the change of ownership, when some of the management team failed to see MicroProse as the creative and productive place it was. He says the happy atmosphere was seen as a playground attitude.

The fun times were starting to come to an end and, in 1996, a decision was made to cut more MicroProse staff. This led to the departure of Sid Meier and Jeff Bridges, who formed Firaxis Games, although *Civilization II* in 1996 was released by MicroProse. The Spectrum HoloByte brand was dropped, however, and all of the company's games were subsequently released under the MicroProse banner. But in the UK, the cuts were drastic and many staff walked out. Psygnosis had specifically opened an office in Stroud and the artists, programmers and designers went there.

"Over time, as staff numbers shrank and layout changes were forced on the developers, the management eventually moved all developers into one, large, brightly lit room," says Andy. "The theory behind this was supposedly to increase communication between artists and programmers, though I, for one, didn't experience any increase in communication between the two groups – it had always been just fine. I did see an unmistakable reduction in the creative atmosphere of the art room, though."

A year later and MicroProse's future was again in the balance. GT Interactive agreed to snap up the firm for $250 million but the deal fell through, having a devastating effect on MicroProse's share price. Worse was to come when MicroProse was sued over the *Civilization* brand by Avalon Hill and Activision. MicroProse had licensed the *Civilization* title from Avalon Hill, who'd helped to delay the legal wrangling up until this point. Interestingly, MicroProse used a cunning way to get around this, snapping up the company that originally designed and manufactured the *Civilization* board game – Hartland Trefoil – and suing Avalon Hill and Activision for trademark infringement and unfair business practices, as a result of Activision's decision to develop and publish *Civilization* computer games.

The whole issue was resolved in July 1998. Hasbro – who had formed its own interactive division three years earlier – was looking to acquire MicroProse and Avalon Hill. A deal was struck which gave MicroProse the rights to the name and handed Activision a licence to publish *Civilization: Call To Power*. MicroProse's office in Austin, Texas was then closed and, on 14 September, Hasbro announced that it had bought 91 per cent of MicroProse's shares in a deal worth $70 million.

"The funny thing is, we almost bought Avalon Hill," says Bill. "There was an issue surrounding *Civilization* and we had to put a card in the game's box advertising Avalon Hill's board game. It's fair to say Sid took inspiration for both *Civilization* and *Railroad Tycoon* from Avalon Hill."

It marked a new era for Hasbro, who had been working almost exclusively with outside development teams since its inception. Hasbro also bought Atari, which gave it the rights to *Centipede*, *Asteroids*, and *Missile Command*. By buying MicroProse, Hasbro had a quick and easy entry into the strategy game PC market.

With Hasbro in control of a wealth of franchises, a master plan emerged. The PC market was sidelined as the money men started to see the cash to be made by porting MicroProse games to console. Tom Dusenberry, president of Hasbro Interactive said at the time: "We look forward to taking these great games to new platforms, including the Sony PlayStation, Nintendo 64, Sega Dreamcast and more."



1990 RAILROAD TYCOON, SILENT SERVICE II, RED STORM RISING AND CIVILIZATION ARE RELEASED IN A STONKING YEAR FOR MICROPROSE.

1991 MICROPROSE GOLF AND F-15 STRIKE EAGLE II ARE LAUNCHED.

1992 MICROPROSE ACQUIRES LEEDS-BASED FLIGHT-SIM DEVELOPER VEKTOR GRAFIX. MICROPROSE FORMULA ONE GRAND PRIX REVS ITS ENGINE AND B-17 FLYING FORTRESS SALES GO SKY HIGH.

1993 MICROPROSE IS ACQUIRED BY SPECTRUM HOLOBYTE. BILL STEALEY DEPARTS MICROPROSE AND SPECTRUM HOLOBYTE AGREES TO BUY OUT HIS SHARES.

1994 X-COM: UFO DEFENSE IS RELEASED.

1995 COLONIZATION BECOMES ANOTHER SID MEIER CLASSIC.

1996 X-COM 2: TERROR FROM THE DEEP COMES OUT FOR PLAYSTATION. SPECTRUM HOLOBYTE BUYS MASTER OF ORION AND MASTER OF MAGIC DEVELOPER, SIMTEX. CUTS MADE TO MICROPROSE STAFF.

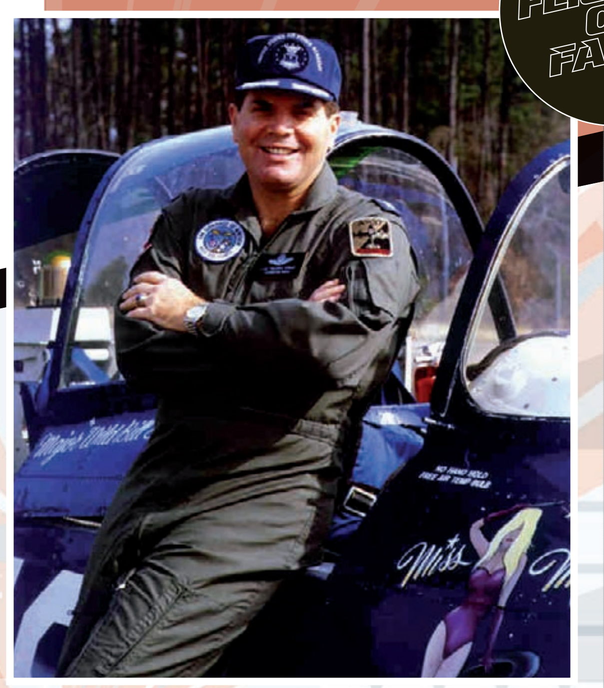
1997 MAGIC: THE GATHERING SPELLS OF THE ANCIENTS LAUNCHES. GT INTERACTIVE ANNOUNCES AN AGREEMENT TO ACQUIRE MICROPROSE FOR $250 MILLION IN STOCK. DEAL LATER COLLAPSES. MICROPROSE SUED BY AVALON HILL.

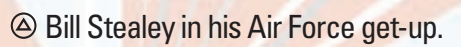
1998 RELEASES FOR WORMS 2 AND M1 TANK PLATOON II. MICROPROSE SETTLED LAWSUITS FILED AGAINST IT BY AVALON HILL AND ACTIVISION. AUSTIN, TEXAS STUDIO CLOSED DOWN. COMPANY PREPARED FOR SALE.

1999 HASBRO INTERACTIVE CLOSES DOWN EX-MICROPROSE STUDIOS IN ALAMEDA, CALIFORNIA AND CHAPEL HILL, NORTH CAROLINA.

2001 FINAL AMERICAN MICROPROSE GAME, EUROPEAN AIR WAR, CARRIES INFOGRAMES LOGO.

2002 MICROPROSE STUDIO IN CHIPPING SODBURY, UK CLOSES. GRAND PRIX 4 BECOMES LAST-EVER MICROPROSE GAME.




Bill Stealey in his Air Force get-up.

FLIGHTS OF FANCY

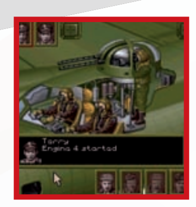
Gunship 2000
Arguably the best of MicroProse's flight sims, the addictive *Gunship 2000* lets you pursue a career as chopper pilot in the US Army. Putting aside the poor intro, the game itself soon hooks you in and you find yourself soaring among the trees, watching the rivers flow and the land below melt away.



Command HQ
It's another quest for world domination with this RTS game, that not only sold well, but wowed with its cool graphics and ace AI. As one of the first multiplayer wargames and with the two World Wars and Cold War to work with, *Command HQ* was a triumph for designer Dan Bunten.



Global Conquest
As an externally developed MicroProse game, *Global Conquest* was released on the MicroPlay label – with the likes of *Command HQ* and *Xenophobe*. Developed by Dan Bunten (his second and last for MicroProse), it nailed military strategy and could be played by up to four gamers.



B-17 Flying Fortress
There's no doubting the brilliance of *B-17* as you take to the glorious skies in your Boeing B-17 bomber in World War II. Primitive though the graphics may be in comparison to the PC games of today, the complex simulation (the manual is more than 200 pages long) still makes it great today.



Sid Meier's Covert Action
Play as a US government agent eliminating terrorist groups and other baddies in this masterful game. It's all about trying to avoid exposing yourself, working in the background, spying on the enemy, working out the hidden messages in notes and listening in on other people's conversations.



Subwar 2050
Subwar 2050 is a 3D submarine simulator and one with sheer depth, too. Packed with innovation and with options to fine-tune the abundance of options, *Subwar 2050* was a breath of fresh air in the early-Nineties and it doesn't appear to have lost any of its magic today.

Despite the upbeat mood of Tom Dusenberry, the late-Nineties was a time of worry for MicroProse's staff, spread around America and England. It was not helped by the fact that bug-riddled flight sim *Falcon 4.0* was so poorly received by consumers. As it turned out those worries had some foundation: Hasbro closed the MicroProse studios in Alameda, California and Chapel Hill, North Carolina, in December 1999.

A two-year period of relative stability followed and there was hope after Infogrames bought Hasbro Interactive for $100 million. As with many takeovers by the French publishing giant, the MicroProse name was dropped and all games were released under the Infogrames name.

The MicroProse name continued in the UK for a while longer. *Grand Prix 4* was released on 9 October 2002, and it was the last Formula 1 racing simulator released by Crammond and the MicroProse label. The UK studio, however, had been closed a month earlier.

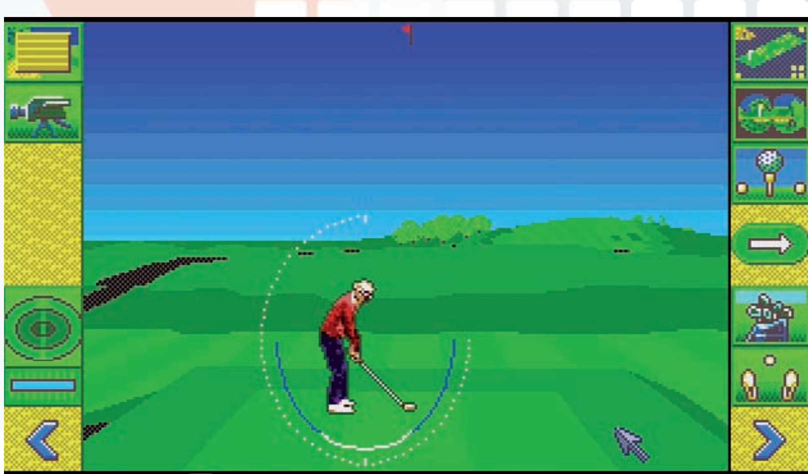
"It was a real shame," says programmer Mark Reis. "I was at MicroProse's UK headquarters for a short period in a snowy late October. The people were all great. My understanding is they had a different way of doing things that worked well and that as long as there was profit, Bill was happy. There were some gems coming from England – *World Circuit* really pushed the technology, the Chris Sawyer games were great and they took Sid's *Tycoon* series to the next level. I'm sorry events came up in the US that required a premature departure."

The MicroProse chapter came to an end in November 2003 when Infogrames – by now renamed Atari – closed the Hunt Valley studio in Maryland. This was MicroProse's original location and it marked the end of a highly successful brand.

And yet the story doesn't stop there. Firaxis continues to this day and Interactive Magic is now iEntertainment Network. Bill has launched Thriller Publishing with the aim of creating a new raft of simulation games. MicroProse was the seed which allowed videogaming to flourish in Hunt Valley, Maryland and it was behind the careers of so many of the most established names in gaming today. For all its troubles, its successes will be celebrated forever.


One of MicroProse's forays into adventure gaming, *BloodNet* aped Sierra's *Quest* titles.

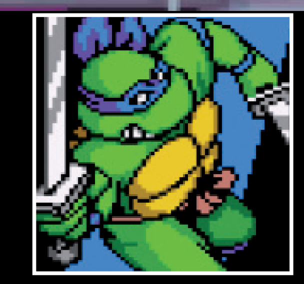



David Leadbetter's Golf was a departure from the usual sims, but it worked extremely well and was finely detailed.

TURTLES IN TIME

Occasionally it happens. A videogame comes along that flouts conventions, takes on the specialised guts and seductive garters worn by flashing coin-ops and betters its arcade forebear.

Released in arcades in 1991, the sequel to Konami's colossal coin-op hit *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* may not have swallowed nearly as much coinage as its four-player predecessor, but it was certainly the better game. However, it would take a brilliantly tweaked SNES port to really open our eyes to that fact…



Leonardo

The steadfast leader of the team is said to be the best all-rounder in game. His attacks are strong, his speed middling, and his reach is okay at best. Personally, we find Leo and Raphael to be the hardest characters to get along with.



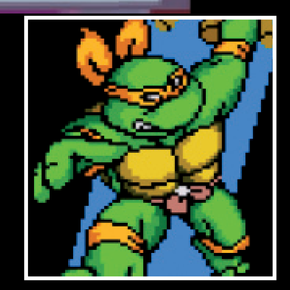
Donatello

Ironically, the brain box of the team is actually the slowest character in the game. Along with Michelangelo, Donatello is probably the best character to pick. His attacks might be slow but his weapon gives him great reach.



Raphael

The coolest character in the cartoon is the lamest in this game. He might be the speediest of his brothers but speed counts for nothing when you have to actually rub your head against an enemy to perform an attack.



Michelangelo

Apparently Michelangelo is said to suffer from short-range attacks, but we don't see it ourselves. Michelangelo's nunchucks prove both strong and offer good reach – making him easily one of the best characters in the game.

MEMORABLE MOMENTS



WHY IS IT A CLASSIC?

One of the best 16-bit arcade ports ever

Sure, *Street Fighter II* and *Strider* were great arcade conversions, but they certainly didn't outshine their coin-op counterparts. Even if you have a passionate hatred for the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, or felt *Turtles In Time* grew very repetitive very quickly, you still have to admire Konami for pulling out all the stops for the home conversion of its unfortunately abbreviated *TIT*. Not since *Green Beret* and *Bionic Commando* on the NES had a home conversion bested its arcade counterpart in terms of both quality and overall enjoyment, because of this *Turtles In Time* joins a very exclusive club indeed.



BEST POWER-UP

Pizza Bomb

Looking like a precarious fatty-trap, The Pizza Bomb kind of makes this list by default as it's the only power-up – save for the health pizzas, of course – to appear in the entire game. Usually, anything in a videogame with a scribble of a cartoon bomb on the box is best avoided. Not here though. Instead of turning our 'heroes in a half shell' into 'heroes in multiple pieces of green seared flesh', one touch of this potent jalapeno-riddled doughy disc quickly puts the Turtles into a convulsive spinning fit – making them temporarily invulnerable to all enemy attacks, and probably quite dizzy, too.



BEST BOSS

Super-Shredder

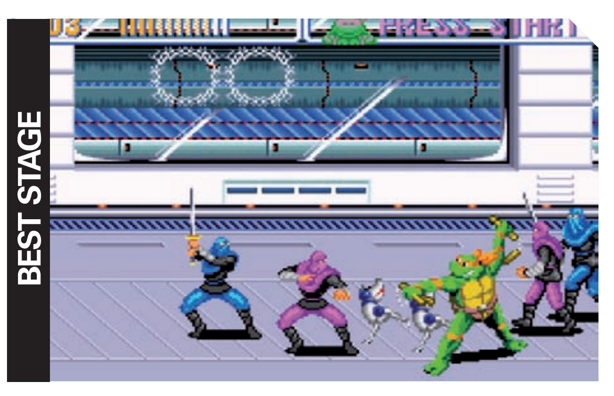
Konami made a few tweaks to *Turtles In Time* for its SNES port. We've mentioned the addition of the Technodrome stage, but there was also some fan service filtered into the bosses, too. In between the releases of the arcade and SNES versions of the game, the second *Turtles* film was released. In reference, Konami included the film's villains Tokka and Rahzar in the game, and transformed Shredder into Super-Shredder – as he appears at the end of the movie. Better than that though, is that rather than building him up only to then witness him fall through a jetty and drown, you actually get a chance to throw a fist at him. Cheers, Konami.



BEST CHARACTER

Donatello

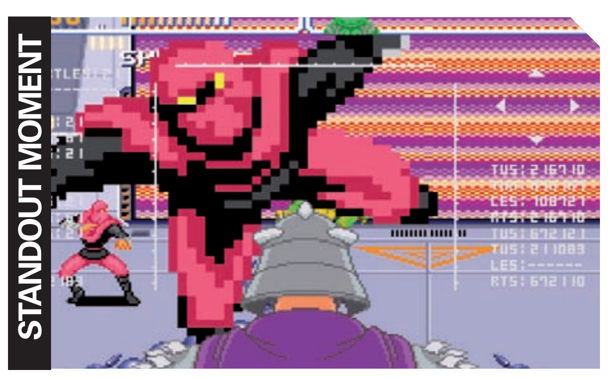
Everyone knows that Donatello is the best character to take into a bout of claustrophobic Foot Soldier smashing. It has something to do with his long wooden shaft, which proves just too much of a handful for Shredder and his goons. The brainiac's bow staff offers brilliant reach – allowing people who are rubbish to keep a relatively safe distance from danger. Ironically, the turtles brandishing sharp impaling implements – Raphael and Leonardo – prove to be the worst characters in the game. While their weapons might look menacing, their airy fairy swipes and stabs feel horribly inaccurate and woolly in the throes of battle.



BEST STAGE

The Technodrome: Let's Kick Shell

Putting aside the embarrassing (and nonsensical) subheading that Konami bestowed upon this stage, The Technodrome was an exclusive level gifted to the SNES port (probably in a bid to give it a bit more longevity than the original game, we suspect). For that reason the two-part Technodrome stage has to stand out as one of the best levels in the game. As soon as the Turtles find themselves behind enemy lines, the abundance of Foot Soldiers increases heavily. Add to this a swarm of annoying unicycle bots and fussy hand-chewing Mousers, and getting through this stage takes a real test of skill.



STANDOUT MOMENT

Tossing a Foot Soldier

If we compiled a list of the greatest uses of Mode 7 in a videogame, tossing a Foot Soldier out of the screen would have to be somewhere high up on that list. The first time you did it was probably by chance. If you're anything like us, you won't have read the manual beforehand, and would've jumped straight into the game and smiled like an idiot when that blocky-looking enemy ninja came flying at you. Brilliantly, Konami utilised Foot Soldier throwing in an innovative boss fight with Shredder. It's one of best boss fights in the game and finds our heroes forced to lob enemies towards Shredder, who's bunkered down inside a tank.

What the mags said… ages ago

Mean Machines 80%

"The gameplay did get repetitive after a while but for a quick 'pick up and play' this two-player arcade beat-'em-up shouldn't be missed!"

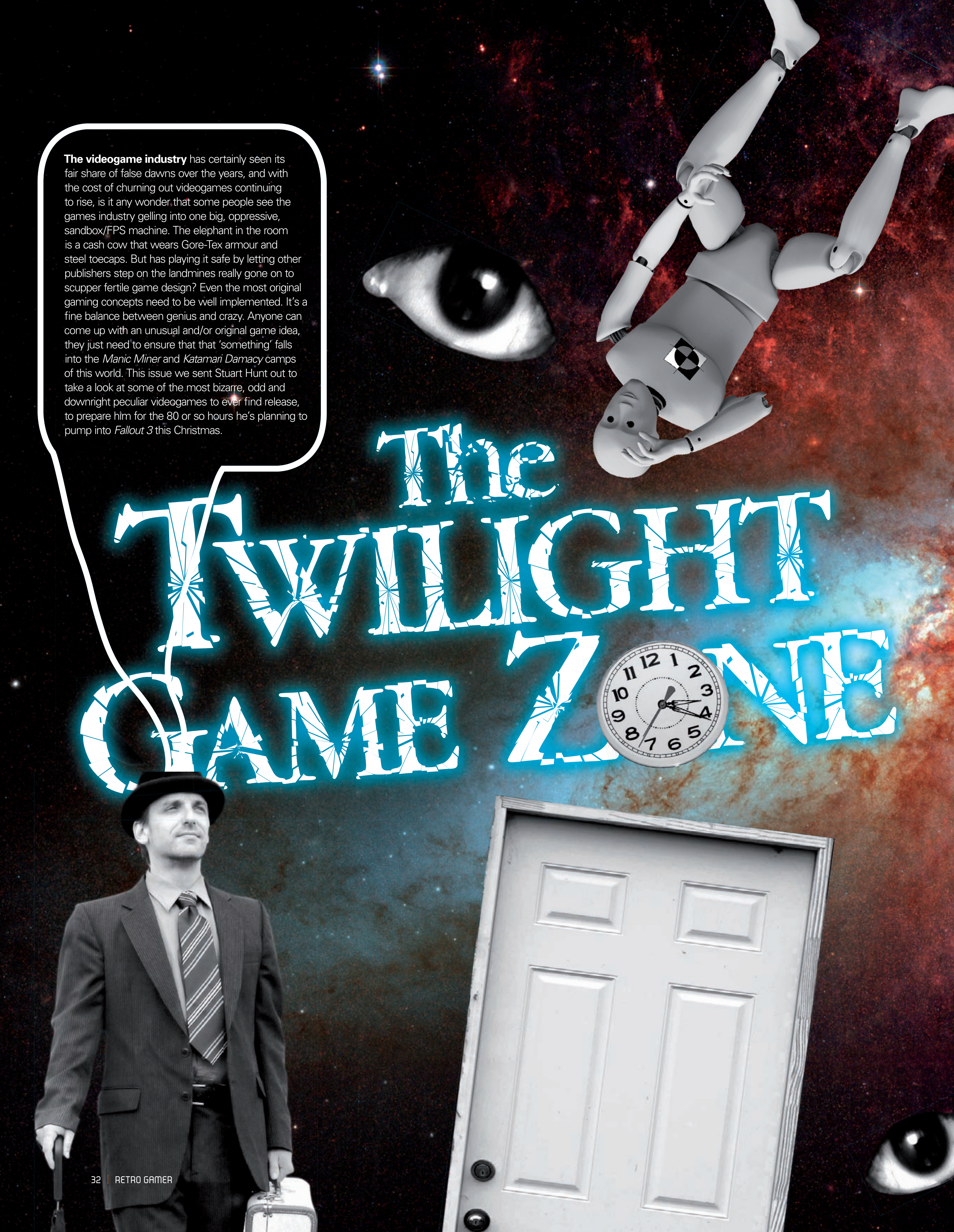
What we think

As usual, *Mean Machines* got it pretty much spot-on. The game does grow repetitive, but what side-scrolling fighting game doesn't. Still a SNES classic, though.



IN THE KNOW

- **PLATFORM:** SNES
- **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE
- **PUBLISHER:** KONAMI
- **RELEASED:** 1992
- **GENRE:** SCROLLING FIGHTER
- **EXPECT TO PAY:** £5-10



The Twilight Game Zone

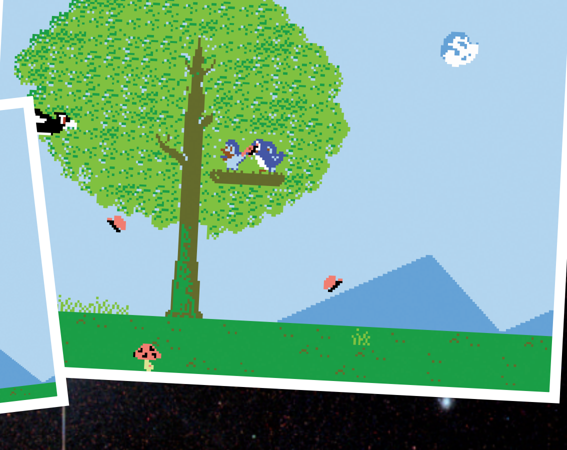
The videogame industry has certainly seen its fair share of false dawns over the years, and with the cost of churning out videogames continuing to rise, is it any wonder that some people see the games industry gelling into one big, oppressive, sandbox/FPS machine. The elephant in the room is a cash cow that wears Gore-Tex armour and steel toecaps. But has playing it safe by letting other publishers step on the landmines really gone on to scupper fertile game design? Even the most original gaming concepts need to be well implemented. It's a fine balance between genius and crazy. Anyone can come up with an unusual and/or original game idea, they just need to ensure that that 'something' falls into the *Manic Miner* and *Katamari Damacy* camps of this world. This issue we sent Stuart Hunt out to take a look at some of the most bizarre, odd and downright peculiar videogames to ever find release, to prepare him for the 80 or so hours he's planning to pump into *Fallout 3* this Christmas.

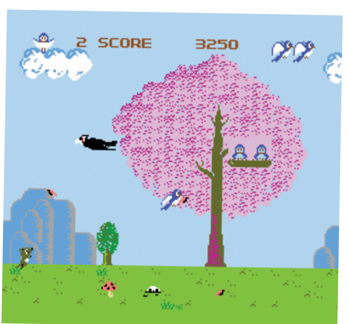
Bird Week

FORMAT: NES **YEAR:** 1986 **DEVELOPER:** TOSHIBA EMI

Set inside a samurai's kempt backyard, *Bird Week* is a bizarre NES game where you play the role of a parental mother bird. The game is said to be a 'life simulator', but in the loosest sense of the term. According to the internet, in order to get the most out of *Bird Week* you have to actually be a bird, possess two thumbs and own a Famicom. The game was released by Toshiba in 1986 and only found release in Japan. With four looping stages, representing the seasons of summer and autumn, and the holiday periods of Easter and Christmas, the gameplay of this little Famicom oddity involves flying around, collecting butterflies and depositing them into the mouths of starving young birds. When the birds have eaten three butterflies, time freezes and you're forced to watch them grow biceps and fly into the sun. The biggest threats you'll face are moles, squirrels and a single giant vulture. *Bird Week* is essentially more basic than a Game & Watch game about taking a single step. Bizarrely, it also features a peculiar 'study mode', which is just a dramatically cut-down one-level version of the game where you start, you feed, you witness birds fly into the sun, you finish. Permeating the feeding stages, *Bird Week* also adds bonus levels set around a lighthouse. In these sections you have just one minute to eat as many fish as possible as they suicidally leap out of the sea.

▼ If you like feeding birds then *Bird Week* is clearly *the* game for you.





Porky

FORMAT: ARCADE **YEAR:** 1985 **DEVELOPER:** SHINKAI INC

To put it bluntly, *Porky* is a side-scrolling reaction game about a pig that drives a Rolls Royce. The game's straight-talking on-screen instructions read like this 'jump high to catch pigs, fire bangers to destroy wolf'. In more eloquent terms, you must collect jumping piglets and reach a finish line, while blasting phantasmic wolf heads using frozen sausages. The very notion of a pig's head driving a car and firing pork cigars at wolf faces is probably enough to baffle even the world's smartest pig farmers, but *Porky*'s weirdness doesn't end there. The game also tries to be a racing game, with Porky negotiating obstacles, jumping potholes and taking off over ramps. *Porky* is ridiculously difficult and its collision detection is frequently cheap. Apparently no one's ever finished the thing, although one guy is said to have come close in 2006. The gamer, who cannot be named for legal reasons, said: "the final stage was cathartic". He also went on to say: "I saw a glimpse of a world where pigs and machinery worked together like tightly oiled cogs. It was a beautiful world that Shinkai Inc had painted, just beautiful."

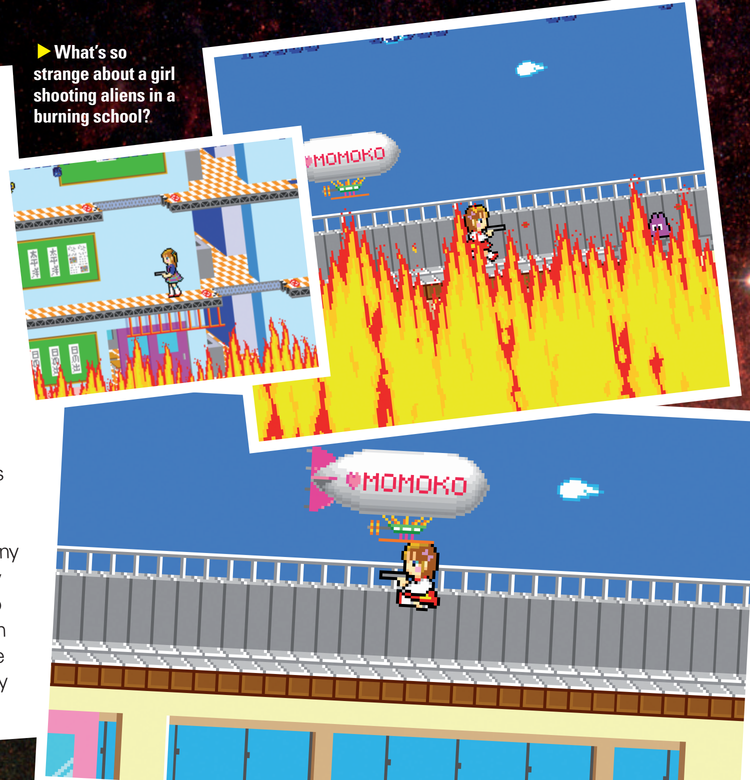
◀ That's right, for just $395 you get 'all the graphics'. Really? We thought you had to draw them yourself.

▶ The rules of *Porky* read like a nonsensical subway tunnel scrawling written by a debased vagrant.

Momoko 120%

FORMAT: ARCADE **YEAR:** 1986 **DEVELOPER:** JALECO

Momoko 120% is the type of game that we're going to assume is based on a popular manga show set in a very dangerous school. The premise is this: a little girl carrying a handgun must continually escape burning schools that are infested with aliens. The levels are dressed with rainbows, teddies, escalators and classrooms. Some of the doors to the classrooms are open, while others are closed. If you go through an open door you will either be transported to a random spot in the level, or discover a secret area. If you find a secret area you have to jump a series of hurdles. If you clear a certain quota of hurdles your character earns a power-up. The aim of *Momoko 120%* is to try to fight your way to the roof before you get engulfed by the rising flames. On the roof of each school awaits a tiny Zeppelin, sponsored by a company called Momoko, which will airlift you to safety. The game is pretty taxing and basically requires the player to give 120 per cent just to get past the second stage. For some reason, whenever you finish a level your character ages by two years. On the first stage you're told your character is four years old, on the second, despite clearly looking in her early-twenties, she's apparently six.



What's so strange about a girl shooting aliens in a burning school?

Snacks 'N Jaxson

FORMAT: ARCADE **YEAR:** 1984 **DEVELOPER:** BALLY SENTE

This is a game where you must force-feed an incarcerated French clown. *Snacks 'N Jaxson* plays out with the clown sat at the head of a dinner table with you controlling the clown's extractable head, which is fastened to its shoulders with what appears to be taffy. At the start of each game the clown will sneeze its own nose off. When this happens it falls to you to rub his face over any and all food items that appear on the screen. While this is going on you must also prevent the clown's nose from smashing panes of glass by blowing it away from the glass or parrying it with the clown's face. A single meal is consumed when you have successfully completed six bounces of the clown's nose. Occasionally a gargoyle wearing a chef's outfit will show up and toss bars of soap and green peppers at your clown. If you touch them the clown will look angry. If you fail to collect all the food items between bounces, the chef will throw a cream pie at the clown.



Don't trust the clown, the clown is sinister.

This game plays out like some bizarre videogame adaptation of a Stephen King short story.

Them That Never Even Made It

The A-Team

Howard Scott Warshaw's *The A-Team* was never released on the 2600, and nor was the game it went and borrowed the guts of, *Saboteur*. *The A-Team* consists of three stages and tells you that your objective is to 'save Hannibal'. That's fair enough, after all, Hannibal was a very popular member of the A-Team. The first stage of the game finds you controlling Mr T's head on a colourful spice rack. Men holding pallets run across the upper and lower compartments of the rack, while an olive-green guy at the top (the A-Team's nemesis Colonel Decker) tries to drop roof tiles on Mr T. Apparently, this bemusing collaboration of sights, sounds and sprites is said to represent Mr T trying to prevent Decker and his men from building a nuclear warhead. The second stage is a showdown with Decker, with Mr T firing cartoon lightning bolts from his eyes in a bid to bounce them off Decker's super-powerful chest and blow up the warheads flashing at the base of the screen. The final stage finds Mr T destroying a helicopter using his laser-sight with just one shot. Sadly, we never get to find out if the guys save Hannibal or not.


Nothing says cool like greasy mullets, angry pouts and tight spandex.



Revolution X

FORMAT: ARCADE **YEAR:** 1994 **DEVELOPER:** MIDWAY

Set in an alternative version of 1996 where a corrupt organisation called NON (New Order Nation) is trying to abolish music and kidnap Aerosmith, *Revolution X* was a cynical exercise in licensing pointlessness. Apparently, the original cabinet for the coin-op was supposed to resemble Steven Tyler's head and come wrapped in leopard-print Lycra. This idea was curtailed to instead make it look like a three-player version of the *Operation Wolf* cab that looks as if it's been constructed inside a moshpit. As the game likes to frequently scream at you, for a single pound coin you had the chance to save the world and Aerosmith, using 'music as a weapon'. This meant that you could negotiate each of the game's six ridiculous-looking stages by firing bullets and lobbing CDs at the same single yellow soldier sprite over and over again. On the later levels you might see a ninja that looks like an amateur wrestler, on another you might catch a glimpse of a caged stripper acting strippery. No matter where you are in the game though you *will* always be seeing that blocky single yellow soldier sprite. Oh, and there's also a giant yellow bug somewhere and a helicopter boss that, literally, takes about one thousand hits to kill. KLOV rates *Revolution X* as uncommon. Of the site's 900 members, only 13 own this machine. Bizarrely, from the same pool of 900 people, only ten own *House Of The Dead 2*. Those figures are bizarre and so is this game. The home ports of *Revolution X* are absolutely crazy, too. The SNES port is a 'gun game' that isn't compatible with lightguns. Instead, you're forced to drag your cross hairs around the screen like a graphic designer working on the ugliest, most offensive piece of artwork imaginable.

One of the 'Nonboys' smashes through a brick wall in one of the many moments of absurdity.

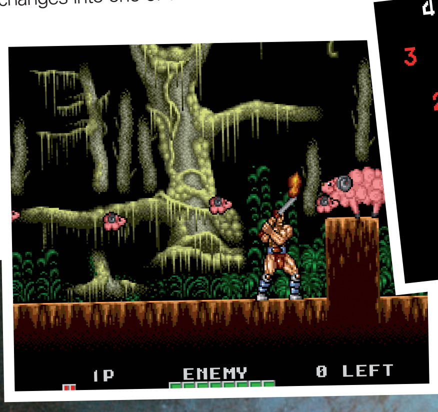


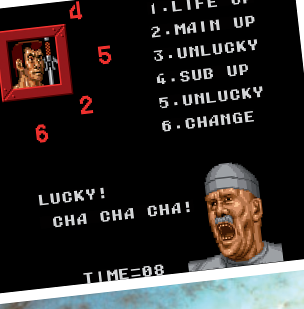
Trio The Punch – Never Forget Me…

FORMAT: ARCADE **YEAR:** 1989 **DEVELOPER:** DATA EAST

Trio The Punch is a boss-rush game from Data East. Like most boss-rush games (*Alien Soldier* being another brilliant example that springs to mind) this game is quite bizarre. *Trio The Punch* could be the demigod of strange boss-rush games. To try to get your head around what is actually going on in the game is almost impossible. You get to play one of three heroes. There's a guy that looks like Rastan, who has a sword with a flame on the end of it, a man that looks like Shredder from the *Ninja Turtles* and a stereotypical dude from the Eighties complete with baseball cap twisted 180 degrees and Freddy Krueger memorabilia. *Trio The Punch* basically involves fighting baddies who look a lot like Karnov, and collecting a bunch of yellow cartoon-esque hearts that scream 'Help'. When you've collected each level's heart quota, an end-of-level guardian appears. The guardians are really the stars of the show. There's a giant Karnov, lifted by many smaller Karnovs, who fires pulsar bolts from his big toe, the Statue of Liberty's foot, and a fight where you tussle with a giant iron fist over some sewage pipes. The best part of *Trio The Punch*, though, is when you spy one of the Karnovs spitting fireballs over the top of a turtle shell. You shout 'Don't do that' before turning into a hunk of tree bark. To which he replies 'I will anyway'. He then disappears and the turtle shell turns into an old man with a giant head, who attacks you with the word 'ouch'. Even weirder is a level titled 'A Curse Of Sheeps'. The end-of-level boss is a pink bipedal sheep that spits tiny, pink bouncing sheep at you. If you die, he curses you. When you restart you become him. The fight then becomes a race to see who can spit tiny, pink bouncing sheep at each other the quickest. Between each stage you also get to play Wheel Of Fortune. You spin the wheel and hope it lands on 'Health Up', 'Main Up' or 'Change'. The continue screen is also incredibly nonsensical. While the game-over counter ticks down, you're shown an image of a Greek statue. If you press the start button, the statue's face changes into one of the Snow Bros.

▶ Our hero unleashes his super weapon against Karnov.



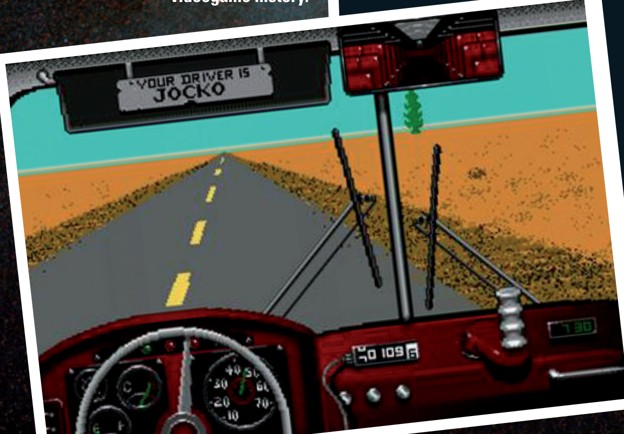


Them That Never Even Made It

Pen & Teller's Smoke And Mirrors

Pen & Teller's *Smoke And Mirrors* was a cancelled Mega-CD and scheduled 3DO game, which, in the tradition of the quirky magicians/illusionists/wizards (whatever it is they call themselves these days), allowed gamers to play a series of cruel pranks on their mates. The game was basically a series of mini-games and was believed to be unfinished, with the Mega-CD version felt to be the most complete port you could come by – a rumour cemented after review code was sent to Frank Cifaldi, founder of The Lost Levels website, by a videogame journo. *Smoke And Mirrors* is fabled for its 'Desert Bus' stage, which asked players to drive the barren and tedious route from Tucson, Arizona to Las Vegas, Nevada in a bus, in real-time, and at a maximum speed of just 45 mph. Because the game could not be paused, such a feat would take the player around eight hours. And what awaited the player dedicated enough to give up a whole working day and risk the life of their Mega-CD? A mighty fanfare, celebration, one of those U2 street parades? You'd think so, but no, just a single, solitary point.

▼ The infamous 'Desert Bus' stage is considered one of the cruellest pranks in videogame history.



The Ninja Kids

FORMAT: ARCADE **YEAR:** 1990 **DEVELOPER:** TAITO

The Ninja Kids is both proof and pudding that Taito would never have cut it as a cartoon studio. In this, its bizarre and misguided attempt to somehow cash-in on the popularity of Konami's *TMNT* cab, it supplants the teenage turtles with marionettes, and replaces Foot Soldiers with Satanists, who wear suspicious-looking sheets over their heads. The four characters in the game each have their own unique weapon and a special power based on the elements Earth, Wind, Water and Fire. The game is set in 1999 and the kids seem to be summoned and/or manufactured by a giant. The first level places your heroes in a street filled with Rastafarian hippies. This particular level ends inside a fast-food restaurant, where you discover that a manager and a nurse are gagged and bound. The manager morphs into a werewolf and you're forced to battle him. Once you have knocked him unconscious the nurse changes him back to normal. The action then moves swiftly on to a bar where you have to fight a rotund businessman, who attacks you with cartwheels. In the next stage, your job is to climb up the side of a building, while avoiding falling atlases and picture frames before fighting two bodybuilders who have arms like wrecking balls. At the end of the game, our heroes eventually have to face off against Satan himself, who takes the form of a statue that fires vaporous green stink bombs at you. If you complete the game, Satan has to endure the embarrassment of getting his arse handed to him by a band of puppets, and you get to read some credits.



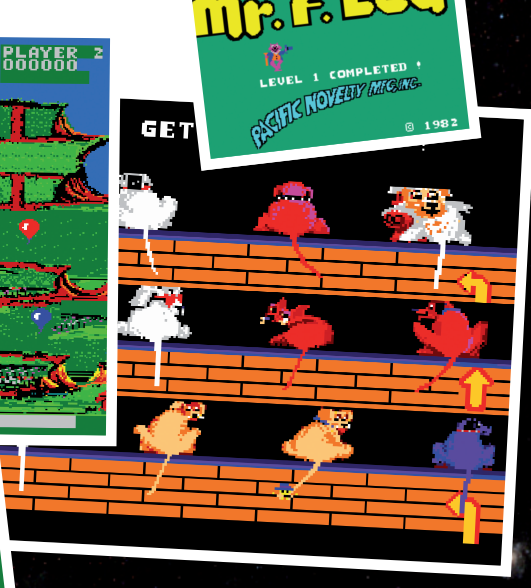
▲ *The Ninja Kids* is an odd mixture of the *Thunderbirds*, *TMNT* and *Captain Planet*.

The Amazing Adventures Of Mr. F. Lea

FORMAT: ARCADE **YEAR:** 1982 **DEVELOPER:** PACIFIC NOVELTY

The Amazing Adventures *Of Mr. F. Lea* has the best music of any videogame ever. Playing it will probably remind you of the Seventies, or the *Snoopy* cartoon, despite clearly having absolutely nothing to do with either. The game is about a well-dressed flea whose world consists of four repeating mini-games that can be played in any order. One, called Dog's Back, involves helping Mr F Lea climb up a dog's back, while another, Dog's Tail, finds him swinging from dogs' tails. The stage Dog Hollow is an ugly looking *Donkey Kong* rip-off, and the last stage, Lawnmower, is fundamentally a *Frogger* clone. With that in mind, if you can ignore the fact that the game lets you play as a flea wearing top hat and tails, this isn't innovative in the slightest. Its use of jarring colours is astounding and the decision to make Mr F Lea the actual size of a flea is problematic. On a positive note, it's Ashley Day's favourite arcade game starring a flea. Officially.

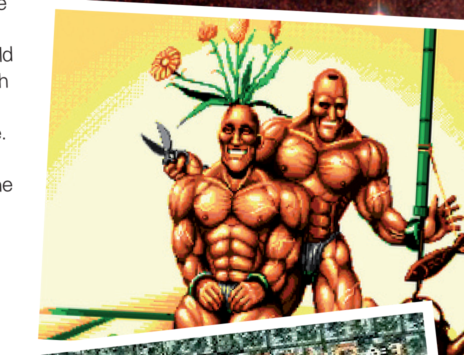




Cho Aniki: Super Big Brothers

FORMAT: VARIOUS **YEAR:** 1992 **DEVELOPER:** MASAYA

Cho Aniki is often heralded as *the* quintessential mind-mess videogame. Let it be said that being able to play any of the series' games for more than two minutes is the ultimate test that you are completely comfortable with your own sexuality. *Cho Aniki* is about two kids who have the power to summon superhuman bodybuilders, who wear tanga briefs and have prominent holes in the tops of their heads. For the most part, the holes fire bolts of energy, sometimes, however, you'll find flowers growing out of them. That's all we've been able to conclude about the mysterious holes. The original game in the series saw the kids summoning the bodybuilders to protect the galaxy's protein reserve, which is fast being depleted by a maniacal bodybuilding organisation headed by an unsavoury chap called Bo Emperor Bill. The first *Cho Aniki* game was a bizarre sprite-based shmup in the vein of Masaya's excellent *Gynoug* (*Wings Of Wor*). The second and third instalments were peculiar one-on-one fighting games. The most bizarre appendage in the franchise is *Cho Aniki: Kyuukyoku Muteki Ginga Saikyou Otoko*, which is said to translate as 'The Ultimate, Strongest, Most Invincible Man In The Milky Way'. This Saturn/PS2 game is memorable for replacing sprite-based visuals with photos of actual, Japanese men, who played the roles of the end-of-level guardians. The first boss is a giant biomechanical old man with a spherical metal gut and a bald man with an extendable torso living between his legs. He wears a wry smile and attacks you with a pose. The second stage's boss is a human triangle of happy men in their underpants. Later on there's one boss that fights you from a hot tub as naked bald men swim around inside. Despite being heralded as the worst game in the *Cho Aniki* series – it's ridiculously taxing, your player sprites are overtly chunky, and your weapons are stupidly weak – this weirdness would gain the franchise its huge cult following. It sometimes feels as though someone has decided to meld elements from other games without thinking about whether they would dovetail nicely or not. On the other hand, though, *Cho Aniki* embraces absurdity at every possible turn, using its wackiness to provoke reaction and draw attention.





Tattoo Assassins

In hindsight, you'd think that trying to make a better fighting game than *Mortal Kombat* would be easy: you simply make its complete polar opposite and job done. Bizarrely, this simple ploy wasn't followed by Data East with its unreleased *Tattoo Assassins*. Instead, the developer decided to take *Mortal Kombat*, make it clunkier, less playable and injected it with a roster of the most bizarre-looking and ridiculously named characters ever seen in a videogame. Here, rather than Johnny Cage we get former Navy Seal member Luke Chord, instead of Raiden we get AC Current, instead of Nightwolf we have Billy Two Moons. *Tattoo Assassins* is basically *Mortal Kombat* in everything other than name. It was also famed for featuring 'animalities', 'nudealities', a Dolorean fatality, and a move where your character could fire turkey dinners from their butt. Amazingly, all of this groundbreaking gameplay was turned around in just eight months and was spearheaded by Data East's pinball division. Oh, and did we mention that it was trying to be like *Mortal Kombat*. Exactly, we can't quite believe it was canned either.



▶ The similarities between *Tattoo Assassins* and *Mortal Kombat* are fairly obvious.

Shtick Stuff

We've looked at peculiar game narratives but how about peculiar gaming gimmicks. In the Nineties, Nintendo was the undisputed king of throwaway videogame peripherals. Here's just a smattering of its misguided creations…

The Super Controller

The 'super' controller, manufactured by Bandai, was basically a cheap plastic faceplate for your NES controller. Just slot the plastic plate over your original pad to make the already boxy controller even more chunky, boxy and noticeably more uncomfortable. Basically, it's just a brilliant waste of everyone's time and money.

The NES Buzzer

Predating Sony's *Buzz!* by a almost two decades, this beauty is essentially a quiz-buzzer-type peripheral for six players, that was designed for use with just one game: *Gimme A Break: Shijou Saikyou No Quiz Ou Ketteisen*, and its sequel. Neither the TV show, game or peripheral were released outside of Japan. Thankfully.

The Power Pad aka The Family Trainer

This cheap-looking plastic mat might look like a giant game of Ludo, but it is in fact Nintendo's first foray into the world of videogame fitness aids. Unlike *Wii Fit*, the gimmick didn't catch on with fitness freaks and consequently was used by many to either play giant Ludo on or wrap themselves up to retain body heat if they broke down on the motorway.

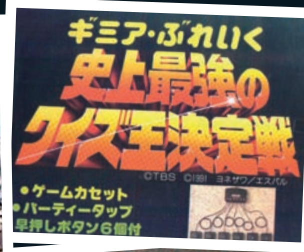
R.O.B.

R.O.B., or Robotic Operating Buddy, to give him his full title, was one of the most successful peripherals created for the NES. The adverts showing two side-partings looking in awe at a toy robot with breasts that stacked up pieces of plastic were enough to shift legions of NES Power Packs in the US. Compatible with just two games, *Gyromite* and the tellingly titled *Stack-Up*, ROB was also Nintendo's most cynical throwaway gimmick.

Roll & Rocker

If you've yet to see Guy Ritchie's latest cockney-gangster movie *RocknRolla*, remember that you could always invest the £7 in this little oddity and give it to your worst enemy this Christmas. From LJN, Roll & Rocker, in the cold light of day, was the greatest single device to demonstrate why people don't play videogames with their feet.







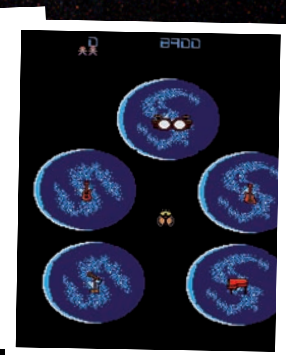


Images courtesy of gamersgraveyard.com

Journey

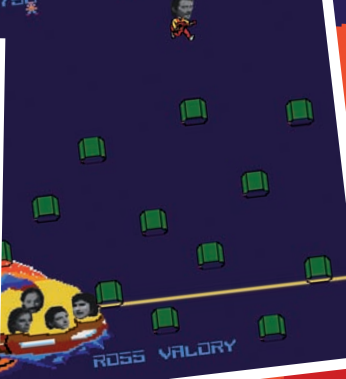
FORMAT: ARCADE **YEAR:** 1983 **DEVELOPER:** BALLY MIDWAY

Journey is the tale of the American cock-rock band Journey, as they embark on an intergalactic instrument rescue mission. The band are apparently so frugal that when a group of evil aliens steal their electro supercharged instruments, they actually choose to jump into a spaceship displaying the characteristics of a scarab and travel inside the head of a giant alien rather than bother their record company for replacements. There are five band members, five instruments and five levels, with each level split into two distinctive parts. The first involves steering Neal Schon, Steve Smith, Jonathan Cain and Steve Perry past a series of Day-Glo obstacles and/or negotiating moving platforms to reach their instruments. The second section is a little bit trickier, and takes the form of a twitch-shooter where the band member's instruments double up as weapons. Apparently, when all the band members have successfully retrieved their instruments they perform a spectacular concert at the galactic stadium. Now we can't comment on whether this is true or not, we've never got that far. We did try to speak to a spokesman for the band, but got as far as typing the word 'journey' into Google and then gave up.



▼ *Journey*'s bizarre cut-and-paste graphics are of particular note.



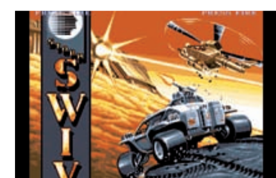




THE MAKING OF SWIV

Take a popular arcade shoot-'em-up, rotate it 90 degrees, add a top-down perspective and what do you get? SWIV, that's what. Mike Bevan chats to producer Dan Marchant and programmer John Croudy about the sequel that span Silkworm on its head

IN THE KNOW



» PUBLISHER: STORM

» DEVELOPER: THE SALES CURVE

» RELEASED: 1991

» PLATFORMS: AMIGA, ATARI ST, C64, SPECTRUM, AMSTRAD CPC

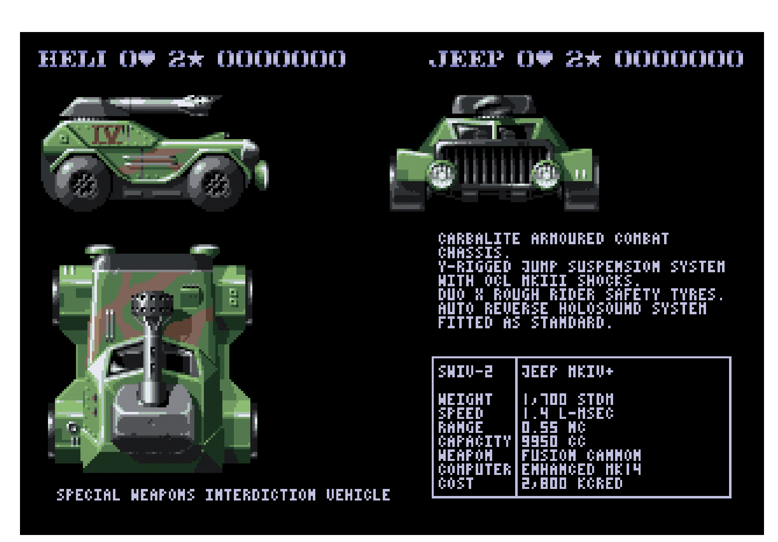
» GENRE: SHOOT-'EM-UP

» EXPECT TO PAY: £5+ (DEPENDING ON VERSION)

***Silkworm* is a fondly remembered two-player shooter featuring a helicopter and jeep in perfect blasting harmony. Playing Tecmo's arcade game with a buddy was an exercise in militarily precise co-operation. Buzzing high above your comrade-in-arms, Heli-Player would destroy incoming aerial attackers setting their sights on Jeep-Player, while the machine gun of Jeep-Player would swivel across the screen to destroy attackers from the rear that the chopper's forward-firing missiles couldn't reach. *Silkworm*'s popularity was boosted by the quality of a clutch of home computer conversions by London-based developer The Sales Curve – the Amiga and Atari ST versions being particularly memorable. Producing these conversions had been an agreeable experience for the development team, and they had started to wonder if reviving the two-player heli/jeep combo for a spin-off shooter might be a possibility.**

"*SWIV* wasn't really a sequel to *Silkworm*," says ex-Sales Curve producer Dan Marchant, "but it was certainly inspired by it and several other shoot-'em-ups that we had played and loved. The dev team had already done conversions of *Silkworm* and *The Ninja Warriors* (by Taito) and wanted to do something a little more challenging." The tricky bit was going to be convincing managing director Jane Kavanagh that an experimental, unlicensed game design was a good idea. "We weren't sure Jane was ready for the risk of an original title so we came up with a cunning plan," explains Dan. "We pitched the title as a spiritual successor, even though the game wouldn't actually be based on a Tecmo game. The team wanted to try something different and felt that a top view made the two vehicles more even. We felt that the Jeep in *Silkworm* was much harder to play compared to the Helicopter and that an overhead view would allow the buggy more freedom of movement."

With approval from the boss, the team set about creating a brand new vertically scrolling shooter, initially for the 16-bit computer platforms. "I think the bulk of the design work was done by artist Ned Langman and Amiga programmer Ronald Pieket Weeserik," says Dan. "Ronald worked very closely with programmer John



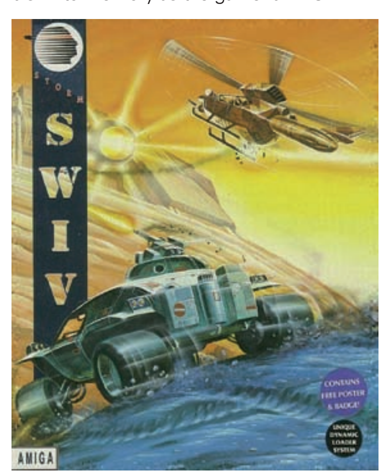
» The Jeep has the advantage of being able to fire in eight directions, which can be locked by holding fire. Watch out for ground-based enemies and incoming bombs!



» The Helicopter is more powerful than the Jeep but can only shoot up the screen – not great for taking out enemies sneaking up behind. If only it had a tail gun…

"WITH FAR GREATER FREEDOM FOR BUGGY-DRIVERS THAN IN SILKWORM, THE SCROLLING LANDSCAPE HAD TO BE DESIGNED WITH VEHICULAR ACCESS IN MIND, TO CREATE A WORKABLE SHOOT-'EM-UP ACROSS TWO GRAPHIC PLANES"

Croudy (we believe they may have had a mind-meld) to develop a very complex engine for the game. First, they developed a Direct Memory Access system that allowed the game to load data direct from disk into memory as the game ran." On



the Amiga and Atari ST, the unique loading system allowed John and Ronald to create an impressive, enemy-packed landscape which scrolled continuously with no breaks in the gameplay. "This meant the game had one giant long level (with constantly changing graphics) and no between-level loading," continues Dan. "It allowed them to dynamically update the level, so that if the player blew up a large enemy tank or similar item, a large crater could be stamped over the level graphic deforming the landscape."

"The loading system was called DLS (Dynamic Loader System)," says Amiga/ST programmer John Croudy, recalling the ingenious technique. "We actually developed the idea for *The Ninja Warriors*, which had separate levels but loaded its sprites [moving objects] ahead of time. In *SWIV* this loader was reinvented and updated to allow both background tiles and sprites to be loaded in advance. The level map had markers for each background section or sprite, placed so that a sprite that was going to be needed sometime in the near future got loaded in time."

With far greater freedom for buggy-drivers than in *Silkworm*, the scrolling landscape had to be designed with vehicular access in mind, to create a workable shoot-'em-up across two graphic planes. While the helicopter sailed effortlessly above, bridges allowed the Jeep to circumnavigate canyons and other obstacles early on in the game, and later, a *SpyHunter*-style transformation into a Speedboat allowed progression on to a network of waterways. "We had to plan the Jeep's path and also introduce the switch between Jeep and Speedboat to allow for areas of water. We also had to balance the numbers of land and air-based enemies and those air enemies that could bomb the buggy," says Dan. "Ned was the only person in the office able to complete the game using the Jeep. He and I were the first people ever to play the Amiga version from start to end in two-player mode."

» *SWIV*'s daddy – The Sales Curve's port of *Silkworm* for the Amiga.



DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

SILKWORM
SYSTEMS: CPC, NES, ATARI ST
YEAR: 1988

THE NINJA WARRIORS
SYSTEMS: VARIOUS
YEAR: 1989

SHINOBI
SYSTEMS: VARIOUS
YEAR: 1989

RODLAND (PICTURED)
SYSTEMS: AMIGA, C64, ATARI ST
YEAR: 1991





SILKWORM IN VERTICAL?



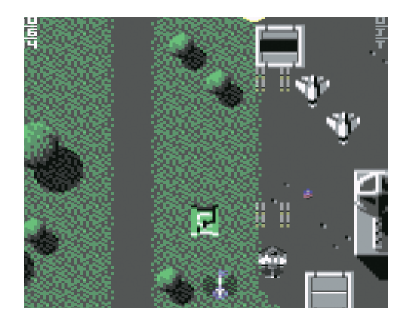
SWIV made for a catchy acronym and title, aping children's TV show and toy line *M.A.S.K.* and generally sounding pretty snappy. But what did it actually stand for? We can now reveal the truth for you lucky **Retro Gamer** readers. Artist Ned Langman explains: "As we didn't have the licence for a *Silkworm* sequel we changed it to initials 'SW', but 'SWII' looked rubbish, so we did a George Lucas and skipped a few episodes." But wait, there's more. It seems Dan had a bit of fun exploiting the curiosity of poor magazine staff writers back in the day. "The name was part of the plan we used when pitching the idea to our boss and then became an integral part of the PR for the game," he remembers. "I told Jane that we wanted to do an unofficial sequel to *Silkworm* and that we would play on the confusion over the title when presenting to the press – as well as being producer I had to visit the various magazines as we had no PR person. I came up with a selection of names for the game and gave different ones to different magazines – '*Silkworm IV*' (so far beyond *Silkworm* that it skipped II and III and went straight to IV), '*Special Weapons Interdiction Vehicles*' and '*Secret Weapons Installation Verification*'. I think there were a couple more but my memory is cloudy now…"

THE MAKING OF... SWIV

CONSOLE CAPERS

SWIV made it on to the Mega Drive and SNES consoles, imaginatively enough, as *Mega SWIV* and *Super SWIV* respectively. Dan Marchant had left the team by this stage, and these versions were designed by Ronald, and programmer Steve Snake, with Ned Langman, who once again also produced the graphics. The console versions are quite different from even the 16-bit computer versions. The visuals have been completely revamped in favour of a more colourful, *Thunderbirds*-style look, the buggy can now jump obstacles freely, and player weaponry has been ramped up with an arsenal which includes various smart-bomb-like 'super-weapons'. Unfortunately, the Sales Curve team only had around six months to put the games together, and the PAL releases had fewer levels than the team initially intended. A slightly modified version of the game, with tweaked levels including an all-new opening stage, was released in the US as *Firepower 2000*.





Other features retained from *Silkworm* included the Jeep's swivelling machine gun, the spherical shield pick-ups, which could be detonated 'smart bomb'-style, and the multi-part mini-bosses that peppered players with laser fire and yielded weapon upgrades on their destruction. *SWIV* added more extreme firepower for each player, and hostile enemy outposts which served as the major boss encounters in the game. Ned particularly cherished his design role, and the game's futuristic tone, which gave him an opportunity "to create loads of Derek Meddings-style vehicles."

Even on the Amiga and ST, the ambitious number of in-game moving objects (twice the sprite count of the average shooter, as every alien is mirrored by an on-screen shadow) required some clever programming tricks to keep it fluid. "All the enemy sprites were drawn using the blitter chip," says John. "The player bullets were hardware sprites. Ronald created a clever multiplexing system to 'reuse' the hardware sprites during different parts of the electron beam scan. This allowed lots and lots of bullets. The shadows were one bit-plane (two colours) and only used about a quarter of the resources of a normal sprite."

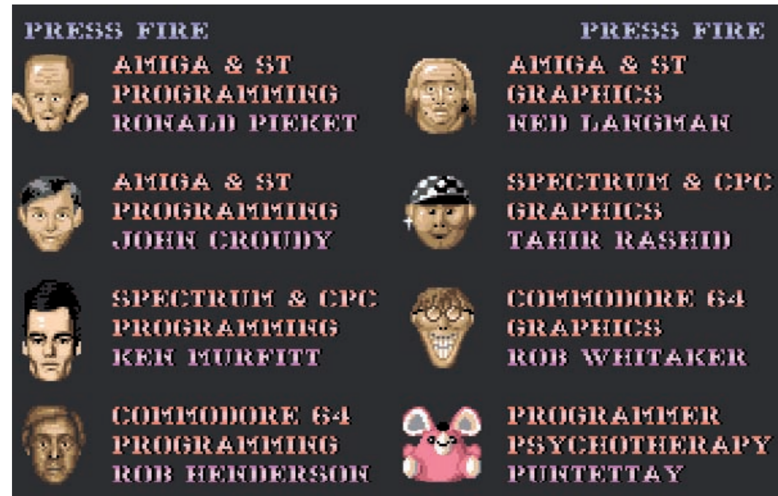
The high object count was an impressive feat, but they also all needed to be told what to do. "Ronald had to invent a very clever optimisation to support the insane number of bullets on screen when your vehicle was highly powered up," says John. "Back then, there wasn't a lot of processor power available – an Amiga 500 had a CPU speed of about 7MHz. The problem with doing collision detection is that every bullet has to check every alien to see if it's hit something. When there are lots of bullets and aliens on screen, this amounts to lots of checks, which slows the game down. Ronald devised a coding optimisation that reduced the number of bullet-to-alien checks required so the game didn't slow down much even when there was tons of action on screen."

There were additional programming hurdles for the Sales Curve team. "The coding for the Direct Memory Access system was a nightmare," recalls Dan, "as were the other vital elements of the engine, such as the 'Entity' system, which intelligently loaded enemy vehicles if there was memory available. It also required a complex memory manager to flush out old sprite and background graphics and free up blocks of memory so that new elements could be loaded in. This sort of memory management is fairly common now but was very advanced at the time."

"The Entity system was a complete co-operative multi-tasking system," John elaborates. "It meant that we could write the code for the loader, or an alien or anything else, as if it was the only program running. This removed any dependencies between each system and made it all a lot easier to programme." The complex enemy attack formations forming the core of the game were controlled by a separate, self-contained system running in tandem with Entity. "Ronald called it the UFO System," says John. "A UFO was an Entity that knew how to use graphics, do animations, and move around on the screen. It had an elaborate animation system built into it as well as some pretty sophisticated movement routines that allowed aliens to swoop down in curved attack patterns, or rotate around each other in circular patterns. UFOs also knew about each other's existence so that an alien could be made out of lots of little parts that followed each other around and interacted. The most obvious example of this must be the 'Goose' boss in *Silkworm* and *SWIV*."

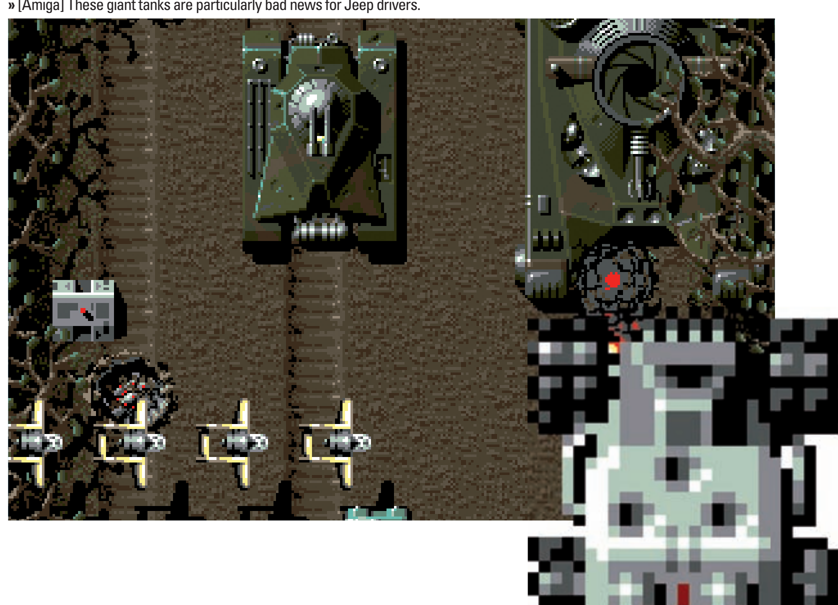
Presentation-wise, *SWIV* was a step up from *Silkworm*, from the memorable introductory screen to Andrew Barnabas's slick soundtrack. "I wrote the various screens that appeared while the game was idling waiting for someone to press start," says John. "There were schematics of the Jeep and Helicopter with the kind of silly text you see in films, such as 'twin overhanging sprocket injector systems' or something daft like that." Ned's contribution to the game's attract mode was equally droll – a set of amusing caricatures of the team for the title credits. "I also wrote the end-of-game sequence, which consisted of a collapsing reactor and hemispherical plasma cloud," adds John. "Ned drew the graphics and I made it all blow up. We based the design of this screen on the sequence from *Return Of The Jedi* where they shoot the Death Star reactor and then fly out as it explodes."

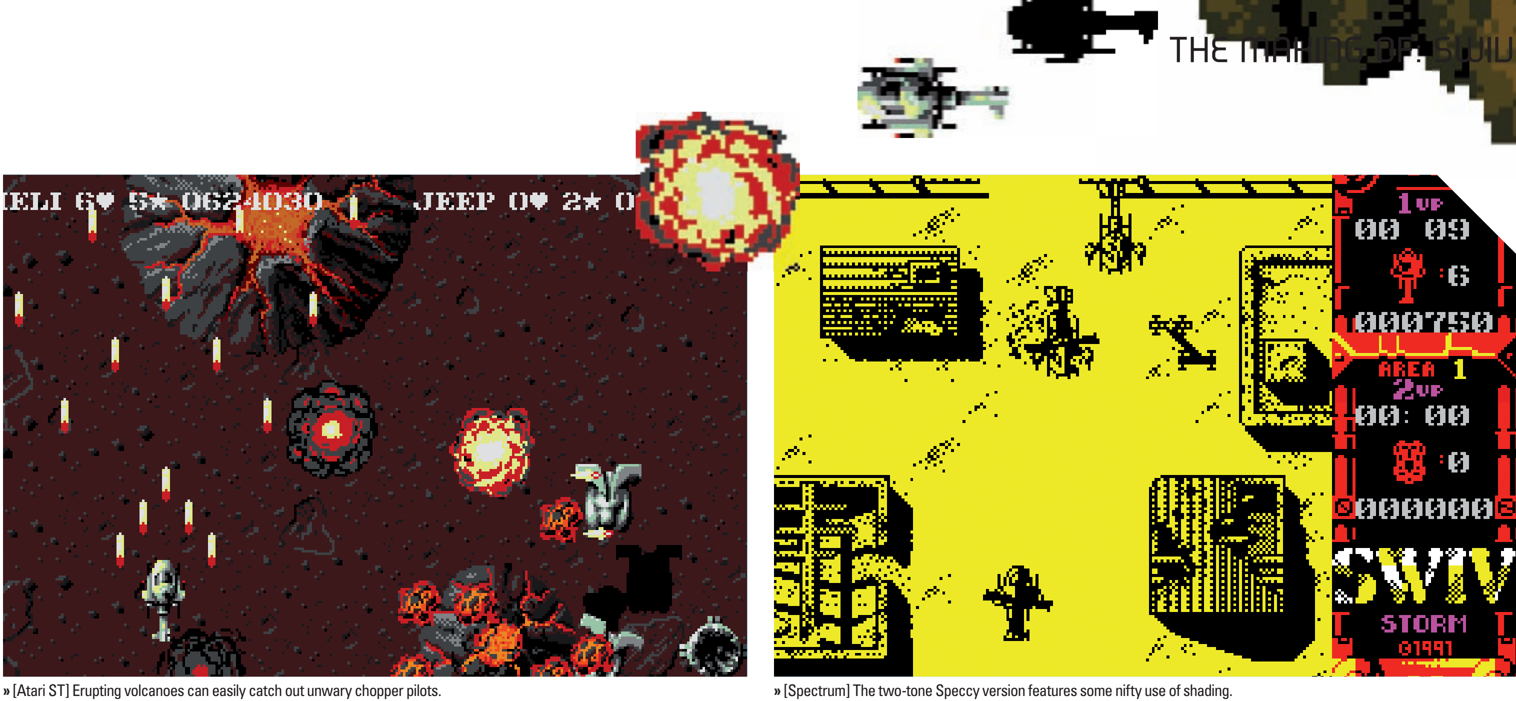
John also remembers working on the tools to create a unique disk format for the



» Ned Langman's wacky team caricatures. Rob Whittaker's definitely scares us most of all…

» [Amiga] These giant tanks are particularly bad news for Jeep drivers.





» [Atari ST] Erupting volcanoes can easily catch out unwary chopper pilots.

» [Spectrum] The two-tone Speccy version features some nifty use of shading.

"WELL-PRESENTED VERTICALLY SCROLLING SHOOT-'EM-UPS ARE FEW AND FAR BETWEEN THESE DAYS SO SWIV COMES AS A GLORIOUS RETURN TO THE GENRE" 92% MAFF EVANS, AMIGA FORMAT, APRIL 1991

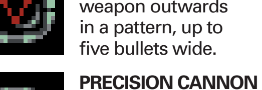
16-bit versions, a measure taken to curb the hackers. "Ronald designed an entirely new low-level disk format which could not be read by just any Amiga," he explains. "The idea behind this was to prevent piracy. It didn't. The game was cracked in just two days. It usually only took a few hours for a cracked version to be released, so our disk format slowed them down, but they still managed it. We couldn't believe these guys managed to copy our special disks because you needed our software to read them. They must have figured out how DLS worked and ripped out the disk-format reader. Pretty impressive…"

Simplified versions of the game were also designed for the less capable Spectrum, C64 and Amstrad CPC. The C64 version was arguably the best of the bunch, featuring extensive smooth-scrolling levels and an impressive sprite-multiplexing routine, which displayed many more on-screen sprites than the hardware's standard maximum of eight, steadily and without flicker. "The conversions down to the 8-bit machines were obviously a different order of development," acknowledges Dan. "They were standard level-based games with loading at the start of each level."

As it turns out, the C64 version caused its fair share of head-scratching, and one near disaster. "I remember spending an entire month testing and retesting the C64 version with the programmer, Rob Henderson," Dan reminisces. "He had a semi-random bug, which would make the screen flash for one frame and turn all the sprites a nice shade of pink. After one particularly brutal day of testing we went down to the pub, got a bit drunk and then returned to the office to collect our stuff. Rob went to back up his source code and somehow managed to type 'DELTREE *.*' instead, thus deleting everything. We were just sober enough to leave the machine alone and the next morning our tech man went through and undeleted everything. We never told the boss."

Worrying data-management episodes aside, Dan Marchant reports that the team were more than happy with how *SWIV* turned out, and the game was well received, especially on the Amiga and ST. "After successful full price sales it went on to the Kixx budget label and sold and sold for some years to come," remembers Dan. "I think *SWIV* surpassed the team's original vision," he finishes. "I've been in development long enough to know that you always aim too high and in so doing ensure that you make a great game, but in the case of *SWIV* I think the team actually achieved everything and more."

POWER-ME-UP

SPREAD SHOT
Fans your weapon outwards in a pattern, up to five bullets wide.



PRECISION CANNON
Concentrates your weapon to a pin-point bullet stream.



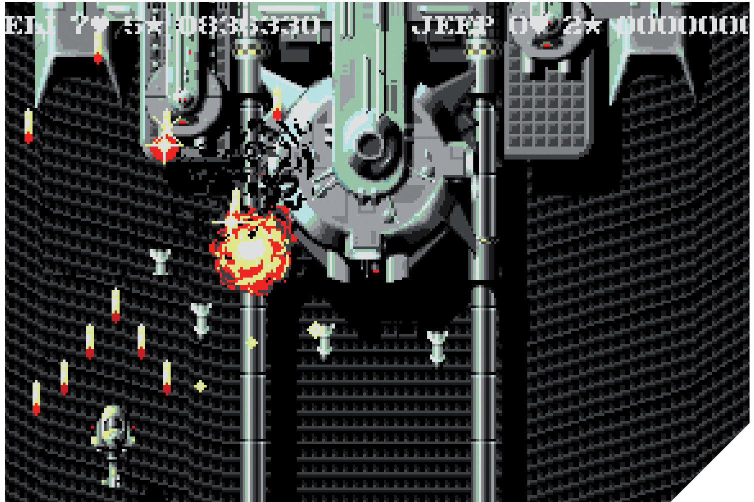
SHOT ENHANCER
Increases your firing rate. Collect to save weapons when killed.

BONUS
Score-enhancing goodies, which also grant temporary invulnerability.

» [Amiga] It all gets a little bit complicated later on…



» [Atari ST] The fourth enemy outpost is particularly nasty on the missile-flinging front.



Final pencil drawing has been rendered in wash and line as a basis for rendering the colour painting in colour.

BACK TO THE DRAWING BOARD

You will have no doubt noticed the cover splashed on this very special issue of **Retro Gamer**. Longtime readers will no doubt be aware that we're huge fans of Oliver Frey. The illustrator's talent has glossed the covers of some of the most well-loved and respected videogame magazines ever printed, so we're always especially proud to have Oli's artwork feature in **Retro Gamer** (we hope some of that brilliance rubs off, you see).

This year we really wanted to give you something a little bit special – a small thank you for your continued support over the years – and we really wanted to get Oli involved somehow.

It was a no-brainer really, but we decided the best way to achieve that would be to ask Oli to create a special one-off Christmas cover for us by taking one of his memorable and most iconic festive *Crash* covers and updating it. So how did Oli go about reworking a classic – especially as he no longer owns the original artwork (it was given away as a competition prize) – and how did he manage to get Darran to look so trim? Well, we'll let Oli tell you, shall we…



Here the sketch has been printed out at 150 per cent of final cover size and covered in soft pencil on the back, ready for tracing with biro on to blank art paper.



▲ The mono underpainting after being scanned, reduced in size and brought into Photoshop. It will be used as a multiplier above a layer which will have main colour painting and modelling applied. Layers above it will contain light effects and final modelling of the picture.

▶ The painting evolves in Photoshop in multiple layers until…

▼ … the illustration is finished barring insertion in the blank magazine covers (mid-left and centre) of a screen grab of the cover pic, scans of Retro Gamer logo and so on to make up little mini covers.



With this issue hitting stands in early December, we thought it'd be nice to try to prepare you for the upcoming festivities. There's a lot to take in over the course of the holidays, what with all those presents to buy, the turkey to stuff, the tree to decorate and all those soddin' cards to write. To help get you through the pre-Christmas slog, make sure you put aside a bit of time to play some games this December. Stuck for ideas? Help is at hand. We've compiled a list of 12 games that you really ought to play this holiday. So, get your trigger fingers poised, and clear your throats as we use our angelic singing voices to countdown **Retro Gamer**'s Twelve Games Of Christmas.



On the twelfth day of Christmas, Namco gave to me... **Twelve Drummers Drumming**

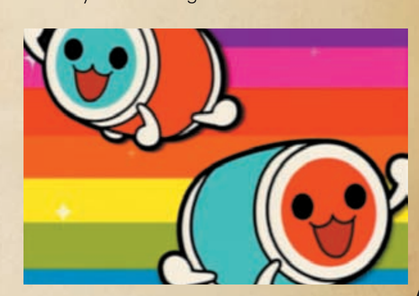


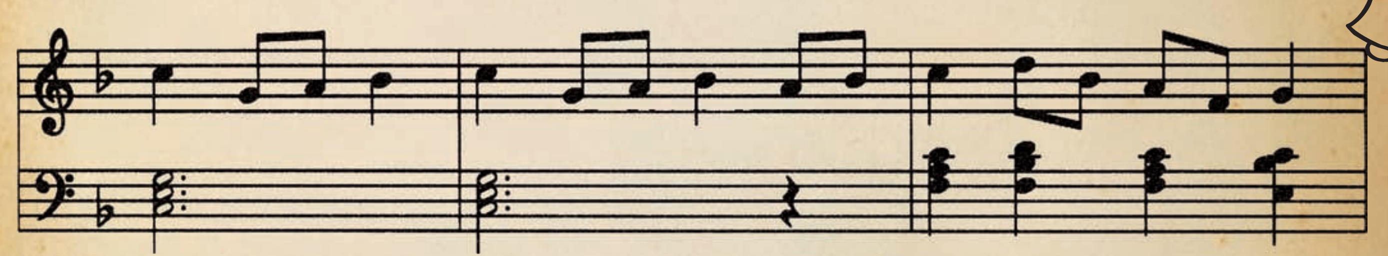
If Rock Band has taught us anything recently, it's that playing the drums is great fun. Still, a brand new current-gen release is far too new to feature in **Retro Gamer**, so we're going with Namco's excellent *Taiko No Tatsujin* instead, and will simply cover our ears while certain readers scream about the PS2 not really being retro just yet.

As far as we can work out, everyone wants to feel happy and cheerful over the holiday season, so a game that's as utterly bonkers as *Taiko No Tatsujin* is going to be just the thing to get you into the festive spirit. Providing, of course, that you have an unnatural love for dancing dogs and squids and enjoy cameo appearances from the main character from *Mr. Driller.*

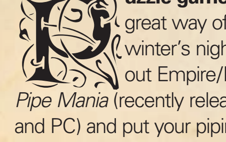
Yes, it's insanely expensive to get hold of due to its bulky nature and the fact that you'll need to import it from either the US or Japan. But anyone who has ever banged along to the likes of Beethoven's *Symphony No 5, William Tell Overture* or the various *Ridge Racer* tracks that are available on the numerous versions of the game, will instantly tell you that it's definitely worth the high purchase price.

Perhaps the greatest and most enjoyable aspect of *Taiko No Tatsujin* though is that, unlike more recent rhythm-action games, like *Guitar Hero* and *Rock Band,* it's far more accessible to play, and it's obvious that the emphasis is on fun, rather than trying to master tricky techniques and drum rolls. Add in its cheerful exterior, eclectic mix of Western and Japanese tunes – everything from J-Pop to Japanese Festival songs are available – and you're guaranteed a holiday that gets off to a cracking start. Oh, and if you're wondering why we've chosen *Taiko No Tatsujin* over the mighty *Samba De Amigo* it's because it's 12 drummers drumming, not 12 monkeys maraca-ing…





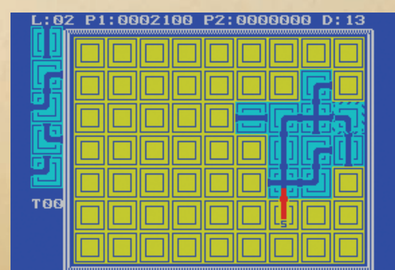
On the eleventh day of Christmas, Empire gave to me... **Eleven Pipers Piping**



Puzzle games are always a great way of whiling away a cold winter's night, so why not dig out Empire/LucasArts' brilliant *Pipe Mania* (recently released for the DS, PSP and PC) and put your piping skills to the test?

A rare release from LucasArts that doesn't feature Jedis, stormtroopers or Jar Jar Binks, *Pipe Mania* (or *Pipe Dream* depending on your preference) is a wonderfully subtle little puzzler that slowly eases you in before hammering you without mercy with its increasing difficulty levels.

Amazingly simple in concept – you're required to do little more than connect a series of pipe pieces together to form an unbroken line of a specific length – the brilliance of *Pipe Mania* is just how tense the whole scenario becomes even after those first few levels. Like *Tetris* it initially feels so easy, mainly because the flooze flowing from your pipe moves at such a sluggish rate. Slowly, but ever so surely, the icky liquid begins to near the edge of your construction, and, like *Tetris*'s ever-growing mountain of bricks, panic begins to set in as you desperately try to make your way through a never-ending supply of pieces in the hope of finally connecting your metal masterpiece before the liquid seeps all over the floor.



While we've already mentioned *Pipe Mania*'s recently released update, it's also worth noting that 2K's *BioShock* features a mini-game version of this classic puzzler. The simple fact that variations of the original game still exist, nearly 20 years after its release, should be more than enough to convince you of *Pipe Mania*'s greatness. If it doesn't, then we suggest that you hunt a copy down and find out for yourself. You'll thank us in the end.



On the tenth day of Christmas, Mike Singleton gave to me... **Ten Lords [Of Midnight] Leaping**

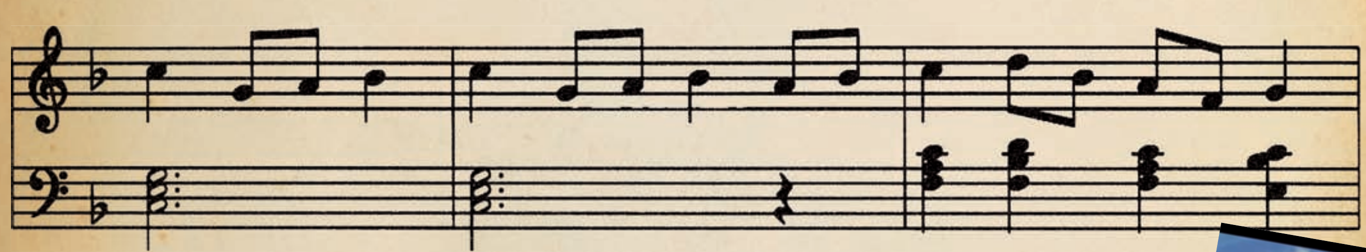


The greatest thing about *Lords Of Midnight* is that it isn't yellow. The skies are painted in a deep royal blue and the icy citadels of Midnight a pure snowy white. Immersion on a cassette tape, that's what Mike Singleton created. An epic, believable, enchanting and fondly remembered Tolkien-esque world oozing with character and stunning visuals. Inspired by his love of *The Hobbit* game, the story behind *Lords Of Midnight* is wonderful: your charge is to overthrow the evil witchking Doomdark, whose 250,000-strong army is terrorising the land of Midnight. Using the power of Ice Fear they can cripple a rival army's morale to give them the edge in battle and allow them to leave destruction in their wake.

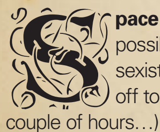
How you went about thwarting Doomdark though was anything but easy. Essentially, the game could be played in two ways. Playing Prince Luxor, you could venture into the frozen wastes of Midnight to recruit lords and aim to topple Doomdark and his army by military means, or, by playing Morkin – Luxor's son – you could travel into the heart of Doomdark's kingdom to destroy the Ice Crown – the source of all Doomdark's power – and vanquish the tyrant.

The melding of strategy, role-playing and text-adventure elements is masterfully juggled by Singleton, and is presented in such a way that the game draws the player into its world effortlessly, and with some glorious snowy wastes to traverse, it's sure to get you in the festive mood.





On the ninth day of Christmas, Sega gave to me... **Nine Ladies Dancing**



Space Channel 5's Ulala is quite possibly one of videogaming's sexist female characters (goes off to play *Space Channel 5* for a couple of hours…)

Where were we? *Space Channel 5*'s Ulala is videogaming's sexist female character. Sultrier voiced than Lara Croft and featuring the sort of sexy attire that would make even *Barbarian*'s Princess Mariana blush, she's not only the queen of fashion but does a pretty good line in cosmic reporting as well.

What we really love about Ulala though – aside from her tight PVC miniskirt – is her legendary dance moves, which make short work of the enemy Morolians she finds herself fighting against. Effectively a variation on 'Simon says', the Morolians will go through increasingly complex dance routines that Ulala then has to mimic. Get them correct and she'll steal captured humans who will then dance, or play instruments, behind her.

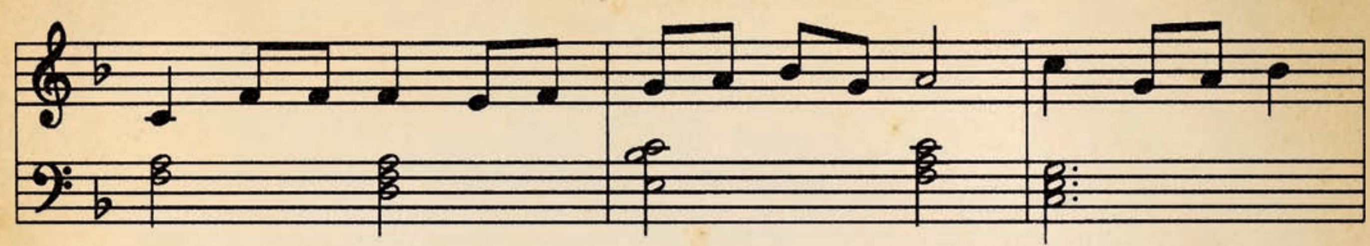
Of course, this being a game by Tetsuya Mizuguchi, creator of the excellent *Rez* and *Sega Rally*, Ulala's on-screen successes – or failures – actually affect the exceptional tunes that play throughout each of *Space Channel 5*'s stages. Successfully rescue the guitarist from the first level, for example, and his funky guitar riff will be heard throughout the rest of the stage, fail to save the required number of humans, however, and you're greeted with a horribly off-key variation instead.

Freed humans continually line up behind their short-skirted saviour and mimic her on-screen actions, which is so captivating to watch you can't help but hum along and marvel at the beautifully fluid animation. Oh, and did we mention that the 'King of Pop' makes an appearance as well?

He may not have the same appeal he once commanded, but there's something delightfully cheesy about seeing the spacesuit-clad warbler dancing alongside our gal. It's typical of the magical moments that Sega could once seemingly conjure up out of thin air, and it makes us rather sad that its newer titles aren't always able to thrill us in the same way.







On the eighth day of Christmas, Konami gave to me... **Eight Maids A-Milking**

This was a tricky one. *Earthworm Jim* and its cow-launching nearly made the grade, while the ability to slaughter cattle in *Diablo* came into consideration as well. Ultimately though we settled for the often-forgotten *Wild West C.O.W. Boys Of Moo Mesa* by Konami (although considering the main characters are technically bulls and not cows, the required milking could become a little problematic).

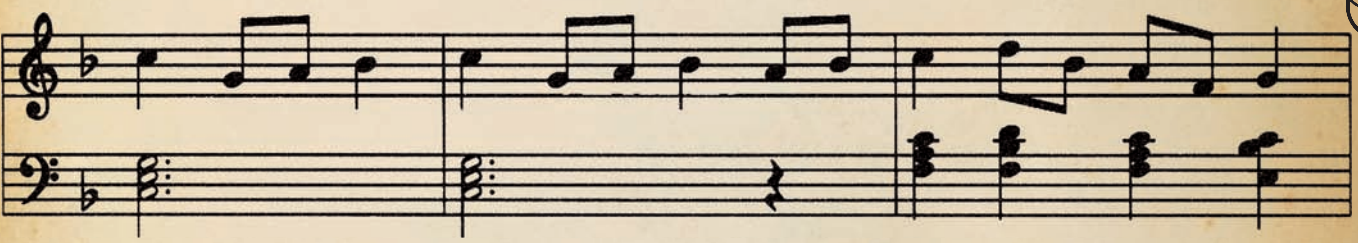
Based on the cartoon of the same name – anthropomorphic animals were all the rage in the late-Eighties/early-Nineties – you're placed in the hooves of Buffalo Bull, Dakota Dude, Moo Montana and Cowlorado Kid and must shoot your way through a variety of beautiful, if rather empty-looking levels.

Playing like a cross between *Shinobi* and Konami's very own *Sunset Riders* and utilising the same arcade board that birthed *Bucky O'Hare* and underrated shmup *Xexex*, *C.O.W. Boys* is a fun little romp that features some outlandish-looking bosses, truly gaudy visuals and a tongue that's poked so firmly into its cheek it's virtually protruding through the other side. Indeed, *C.O.W. Boy*'s humour is a major reason for making our list, as it's just so damn funny. We're suckers for puns at **Retro Gamer**, so adding in hilarious death animations and the sort of humorous enemy routines that made the *Metal Slug* series such fun to play, just sealed the deal for us.

Even if it weren't constantly tickling our funny bone, *C.O.W. Boys* would have still made the grade due to the sheer amount of variety that's been crammed into it. Like Shiny's *Earthworm Jim*, it gives the impression of just being a straightforward representation of its genre, in this case a run-'n'-gun, but adds plenty of variety – like racing through mines or swimming up waterfalls – just like those tins of Christmas biscuits that you always seem to receive.







On the seventh day of Christmas, Yu Suzuki gave to me... **Seven Swans A-Swimming [Singing]**

Yes, we know that *Shenmue II* wasn't the final release for Sega's ill-fated wonder box (it was actually *Karous*, released in 2007), but this will always feel like the videogame giant's true parting gift for the Dreamcast. The original *Shenmue* introduced another brilliant Sega adventure epic to the world, but one that fused the adventure genre with the kind of arcade-style gameplay that had found the company success in the coin-op market.

It's a well-known fact that *Shenmue* began life as a *Virtua Fighter* RPG on the Saturn but, as its development progressed, the game gradually veered away from its pugilist origins and set its sights on the Dreamcast. Many criticise *Shenmue* for feeling far too shallow and because its action takes far too long to really get going. Ask us, and we'll tell you that the game basically suffers from the same shortfalls that plague most origin tales. The first part of the game is all about getting to know the characters, the controls, the structure of play and the game, and the second part tries to shoehorn in some action and allow you to put what you've learnt into practice. To this end, with the shackles already broken, *Shenmue II* was free to become the sprawling action epic the first game was building towards.

The large bustling cities living inside *Shenmue II*'s beautiful Hong Kong parameters are laced with colour, vibrancy and believability. The denizens who operate within it, for the same token, feel settled, rooted and individual, and the action benefits by stretching itself across the entirety of the game, from the crowded stuffy Aberdeen Harbour to the far recesses of the idyllic expanses of Guilin.





Twelve Games Of Christmas



On the sixth day of Christmas, SNK gave to me… **Six Geese A-Baying [For Blood]**



Southtown's crime lord Geese Howard is the recurring antagonist in SNK's popular *Fatal Fury* series – a set of games that marked the company's first foray into the fighting genre on its Neo-Geo machine. *Fatal Fury* is unfairly criticised for trying to be a *Street Fighter II* clone, despite the fact that its development is believed to have begun before (or around the same time as) *Street Fighter II*'s.

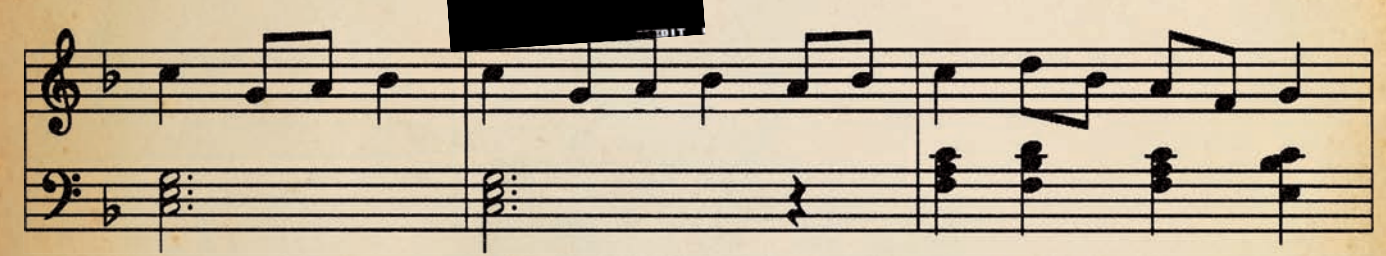
Geese has remained one of the most popular characters among fans of the series, despite only making appearances in six of the eleven games in the main canon – one of these was as a secret boss character, and another in a PSone 3D remake of the original game.

Geese, however, is responsible for organising and bankrolling the first King Of Fighters tournament, a competition that was later used by SNK as a basis for its *King Of Fighters* series. He would eventually get his comeuppance in the finale of *Real Bout Fatal Fury*, the fourth game in the franchise. After a rooftop brawl aloft his tower with the Bogard brothers, Geese eventually falls to his death and is seen for the last time.

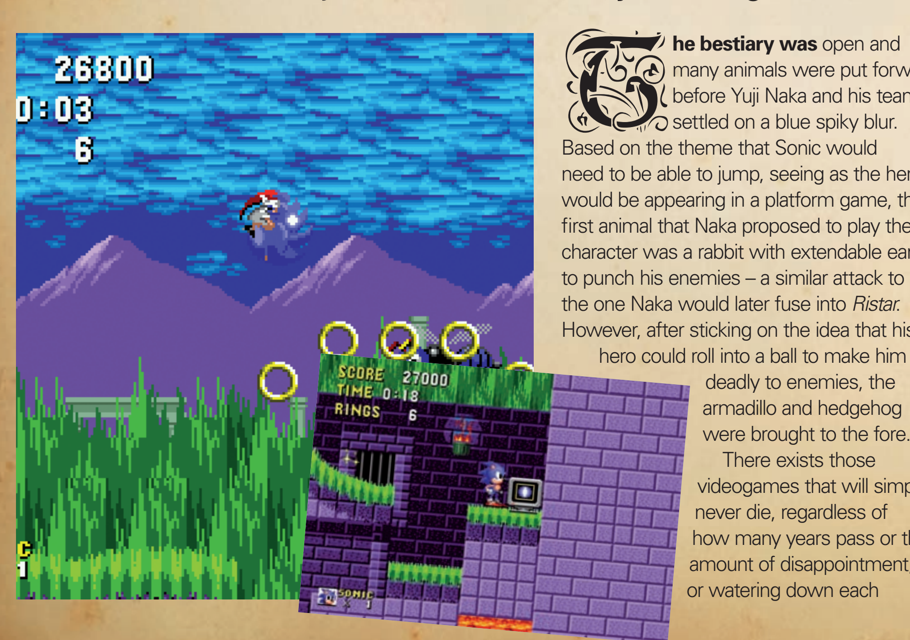




But sadly, while SNK Playmore introduced a novel, but ultimately thankless dual-plane fight mechanic into *Fatal Fury*'s action, replaying the game today it's clear that time hasn't been kind to it. Due to the game's primitive three-button attack system and its meagre roster of three playable characters, we would recommend that you boot up *Garou: Mark Of The Wolves* this holiday season instead, despite the fact it's clearly lacking a Geese… or six.



On the fifth day of Christmas, Yuji Naka gave to me… **Five Gold Rings**



The bestiary was open and many animals were put forward, before Yuji Naka and his team settled on a blue spiky blur. Based on the theme that Sonic would need to be able to jump, seeing as the hero would be appearing in a platform game, the first animal that Naka proposed to play the character was a rabbit with extendable ears to punch his enemies – a similar attack to the one Naka would later fuse into *Ristar*. However, after sticking on the idea that his hero could roll into a ball to make him deadly to enemies, the armadillo and hedgehog were brought to the fore.

There exists those videogames that will simply never die, regardless of how many years pass or the amount of disappointment, or watering down each new adventure seems to bring. *Sonic The Hedgehog* was built around a somewhat incredulous ethos (perhaps even more unbelievable today) that the player should sail through each of the game's six, individual-feeling zones – not worry about taking in the lush scenery, the bizarre enemies or the intricately tight level designs – and allow the game to effectively show them around the place, like a tour guide in a rocket-powered wheelchair. The exploration element, which is pushed heavily in the *Super Mario Bros.* games, has always been used peripherally in *Sonic* (gleaning the whereabouts of the six powerful Chaos Emeralds is pretty much your lot, and even they're not essential to finishing the game). The plucky hedgehog's mantra has always been pure, unadulterated exhilaration, a thinking that was fused into Sonic's life bar, which, quite innovatively, allowed him to be invulnerable whenever he had a few gold rings in his hairy blue pockets.





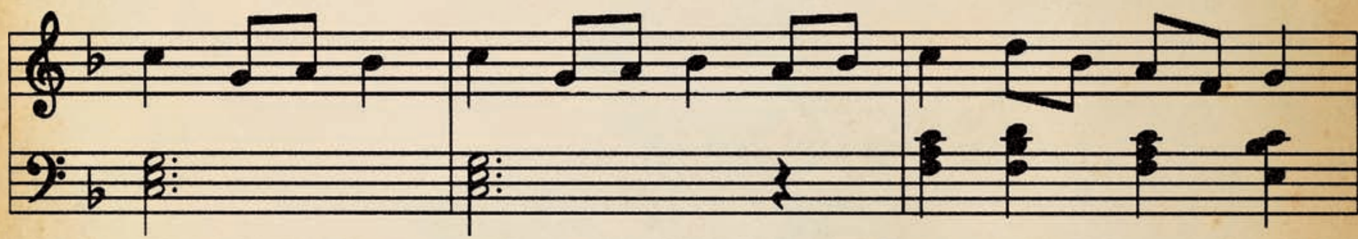
On the fourth day of Christmas, Atari gave to me **Four [Waves Of] Calling [Duelling] Birds**



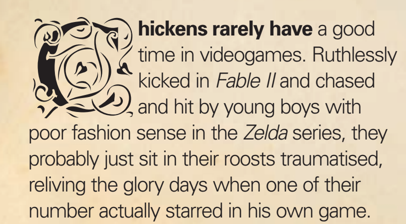
Joust is bizarre. The game charts a futuristic tournament whereby knights duel other knights on giant birds in the guts of a volcano. With a single-screen molten arena featuring nine floating platforms, and wave after wave of winged fury to lance, the game certainly proves easy to grasp, but it's a tricky one to master. *Joust* is essentially a touch-'em-up – a touchy-feely shoot-'em-up whereby you can destroy enemies by landing on their head, as opposed to batting them into submission with fire, laser bolts or protein. However, the seemingly simple task of head stomping, isn't made especially easy here. The birds [an ostrich for Player 1 or emu for Player 2 – birds which, in reality, are only capable of flight if strapped to a Scud missile or a large firework] are twitchy, stubborn, and move with all the precision and gracefulness of a skip full of anchors.

While *Joust*'s mono-screen gameplay may have many pass it off as a simple and limited experience, actually playing the game paints a completely different story. After you've knocked the enemy knights from off their flapping buzzards, the birds will lay an egg before scarpering. If the player fails to collect the eggs another knight will hatch and wait for his feathered steed to pick him up and rejoin the fight. But *Joust* really comes into its own during dual-play mode. Two players can either work together as a team to cleanse the screen of enemies or duel to become the supreme champion of combat. The game offers tense, short multiplayer skirmishes that are guaranteed to send you in a flap.





On the third day of Christmas, Mindscape gave to me… **Three French Hens**



Chickens rarely have a good time in videogames. Ruthlessly kicked in *Fable II* and chased and hit by young boys with poor fashion sense in the *Zelda* series, they probably just sit in their roosts traumatised, reliving the glory days when one of their number actually starred in his own game.



Of course, astute readers will know that a chicken named Alfred is most likely a rooster and not actually a chicken at all, but we're not going to piss on Twilight Games' parade now, especially as its platforming effort turned out to be pretty good fun.

Originally released on the Game Boy, before moving over to systems like the Amiga, Atari ST, SNES and NES, *Alfred Chicken* turns out to be a surprisingly competent – if rather unimaginative – platformer that sees the titular chicken making his way through some truly massive game worlds in search of the evil Meka-Chickens, who have stolen Billy Egg and all his yolky pals. Interestingly, Alfred, in a Replicant-style twist, could well be a Meka-Chicken himself, due to the fact that he explodes whenever he dies, but, like the story, this isn't important.



No, what's impressive here is just how interesting a character Alfred actually is and while many will argue that he's simply stuck behind a long list of other anthropomorphic platforming wannabes, it's rare to see a character who actually acts like the animal he's based upon. Pecking check points, using his ickle wings to float through the air, strutting around like he rules everything he purveys, Alfred is a chicken in every sense of the word and it's a pity that we didn't see more from this charming little character. Still, at this time of year he's probably just glad that he's not a turkey…



On the second day of Christmas, Capcom gave to me... **Two Turtle Doves**



Remember Noah? God told him to build an ark, fill it with animals and go on a cruise. The trip ended after Noah's dove returned with an olive leaf in its beak. It's a touching story, and one that led to doves becoming symbols of peace. World peace, sadly, is a bit of a tough call this year, so how about saving the environment? That's a theme that videogames have been curiously trying to cover for some time.

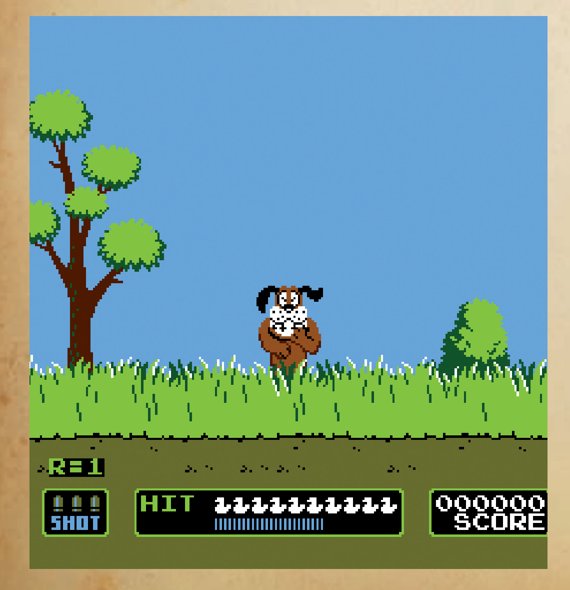
We almost put Enter Tech's *Noah's Ark* in this spot, but because it's rubbish we didn't bother. Instead, we've selected Capcom's *Eco Fighters*. Glorious looking and unrelenting, *Eco Fighters* is a half-decent shoot-'em-up in the vein of *Forgotten Worlds*. While the 'save the planet message' may get a little grubby, seeing as rescuing the planet involves blowing a small chunk of it up, the developers have tried to comically fuse ecological disasters into the missions and enemy designs.

The yellow diggers and demented robotic dolphins and turtles are quite humorous stabs, and all the missions tend to involve a scientist saying 'destroy [insert enemy] because it's affecting the planet's tuna reserve'. But at the end of the day, the telling continue screen proves that the game's creators took a slightly loose approach to the whole environment message. After opting to continue, a bizarre comic strip flashes up, which shows our brave ecological hero spiralling to his death. As he plummets towards the ground he spots an attractive young woman in a pink bikini, looking cute and inviting and it's here that he probably realises there are far more important things to fight for than tuna reserves. However, despite this, he does the right thing and rejoins the fight.





...And A Partridge [Duck] In A Pear Tree.



The average cost of a partridge and a pear tree will set you back about £85, apparently (we made a few phone calls). Given the credit crunch, we simply don't have that kind of cash to put into Christmas dinner this year, so instead we're settling for duck, and catching it ourselves.

If you want to join us then you're going to need to arm yourself with the quintessential duck-hunting simulator: *Duck Hunt*. Armed with a NES Zapper and your virtual canine – Mr Peepers – your mission was basically to murder as many ducks as possible. When Peepers jumps into the foliage, startling several balls of flapping feathers into the air, it falls to you to get them in the sights of your plastic cross hairs and end their sad and sorry pond-dwelling existence. As the game progressed, the action would get progressively harder, as the miss ratio of ducks slowly became less and less lenient.

The game was pretty humorous though – who could forget the way Peepers would pick up your dead ducks, or the way he would chuckle like a buffoon every time you missed your target. It's just a shame you couldn't unload your frustration into the dog. Nothing terminal, of course, just a warning shot to the paw maybe, or maybe a quick curtailing.

Anyway, if you or any of your friends and family is a vegetarian then *Duck Hunt* also caters for their palette. Just plug a NES control pad into the second port to control the ducks, and steer them around the screen to prevent them from receiving shrapnel stuffing this Christmas.

XENOPHOBE

IF CAMERON'S ALIENS WAS A COMEDY



- **PUBLISHER:** ATARI
- **RELEASED:** 1990
- **GENRE:** RUN-'N'-GUN
- **FEATURED HARDWARE:** ATARI LYNX
- **EXPECT TO PAY:** £10



HISTORY

I was never a big fan of Bally Midway's *Xenophobe* when it was first released in 1987. While the game's concept was perfectly sound – investigate a huge spaceship with up to two friends and blast any aliens that get in your way – it had one of the fiddliest control systems around and could be a real bitch to get to grips with if you didn't know what you were doing.

Imagine my surprise then when I first picked up the Atari Lynx version and found out that it had not only ditched the naff control system, but was actually better than the arcade original. In fact, if I'm honest, I'd say it's the best conversion of the game on any available system and should be hunted down by anyone with a passion for Atari's excellent (if cruelly underrated) handheld.

Accurately mimicking the quirky style of the arcade game, *Xenophobe* on the Lynx features beautifully animated sprites that burst with character and look absolutely fantastic on the machine's tiny screen. *Xenophobe*'s sedate pace (something a lot of Lynx games suffer from) initially grates, but the absorbing gameplay means that you soon forget about the few graphical hang-ups *Xenophobe* suffers from.

Indeed, track down three other players (that's right, one more than in the arcade game) and *Xenophobe*'s addictive qualities really become apparent. There are plenty of different enemies to vanquish (our favourite being the one who pokes his head around a corner before lobbing alien eggs into the room), a huge amount of weaponry and items to use, and a slick interface that easily mocks the fiddly control stick that caused so many problems in the arcade.

Xenophobe isn't going to be a game that everyone remembers, mainly because many of the home systems suffered from the same control issues of the arcade original. If you do fancy a bit of *Xenophobe* action then be sure to hunt down the Lynx version post haste. You won't be disappointed.*

*__Retro Gamer__ offers no refunds if you are disappointed.



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ATARI ST

IT WAS THE MACHINE THAT SINGLE-HANDEDLY REVIVED THE FORTUNES OF AN INDUSTRY VETERAN. DAMIEN MCFERRAN SPEAKS TO THE MAN RESPONSIBLE FOR MASTERMINDING THE GREATEST COMEBACK SINCE LAZARUS



INSTANT EXPERT

Recording artists that have used the ST include Fatboy Slim, Mike Oldfield, UK one-hit wonder White Town and French knob-twiddler Jean Michel Jarre.

The machine was amazingly popular in Germany, where it was used predominantly for desktop publishing and CAD.

The ST was the first home computer to feature built-in MIDI ports.

Released in 1986, the 1040 ST variant was the first personal computer to include 1 MB of RAM. When the price dropped to $999 it famously became the first computer to break the $1,000/ megabyte price barrier.

One early tagline for Atari's ST range was 'Power without the price'.

Jack Tramiel included the Hebrew alphabet with ST's ROM character set to respectfully acknowledge his Jewish heritage.

Because the Atari ST hardware does not support scrolling, many games used large borders or frames around the playfield to reduce the amount of data that needs to be copied.

The last major gaming release for the platform was David Braben's *Frontier: Elite II*, published in 1994.

FTL's seminal real-time RPG *Dungeon Master* made its debut on the Atari ST.

The ST is home to what is arguably the world's first multiplayer first-person shooter. *MIDI Maze* used the ST's MIDI ports to permit up to 15 players to duke it out in a rudimentary 3D maze.

Following the videogame crash of the early-Eighties, Atari was in horrifying shape. The company's failure to successfully build on the triumph of its popular 2600 console (a machine languishing in obsolescence by this point), coupled with a generally poor quality of software available had triggered a catastrophic meltdown that very nearly destroyed the entire videogame industry. After the dust had settled, Atari's parent corporation Time Warner had incurred a cataclysmic $500 million loss and was predictably keen to offload its flagging games division. What occurred next has gone down in videogame folklore as one of the most startling turnarounds in the history of the medium.

Trading Places

Ironically, the man behind the product that would resurrect the ailing Atari brand had previously been instrumental in sullying the fortunes of the company. Shiraz Shivji worked at rival Commodore during the early-Eighties and helped build the C64 – the home computer that stole away vital market share from Atari's 400 and 800 range, as well as its 2600 console. "I became interested in electronics from my early childhood in Tanzania and my education in the UK," says Shiraz, when asked about how he became entangled in the fabric of Atari's history. "I attended the University of Southampton and obtained a First-Class Honours degree and then moved to Stanford University in the US to pursue a PhD in electronics. I was granted a master's and passed the qualifying exam but left before obtaining my degree as I was running out of funds. I started working in Silicon Valley and obtained experience in hardware and software." By 1984 Shiraz had risen to the role of director of engineering at Commodore and it was at this point that fate intervened.

Although Commodore was undoubtedly causing Atari some serious headaches, things weren't exactly harmonious in the boardroom. "Jack Tramiel was president and CEO of Commodore and Irving Gould was the chairman," explains Shiraz. "Irving was the largest shareholder and Jack was the second largest. In January 1984 there was a showdown between the two of them over the role of Jack's sons at Commodore." Polish-born Tramiel had founded the company in the Fifties after enduring a particularly difficult early life (he was interned in Auschwitz concentration camp for five years during World War II), so his insistence on 'keeping it in the family' is understandable. However, Irving refused to budge and this forced Tramiel's hand. He called a board meeting and tendered his resignation. "I was tremendously disappointed and shocked at this decision," remembers Shiraz.

However, it wasn't long before the two men were reunited. "I soon met with Jack and discussed the possibility of joining him if he was to start a personal computer company," recalls Shiraz. "There were a number of senior execs at Commodore with experience in finance, manufacturing, design, engineering, marketing and sales that felt the same way, so I told Jack he could count on a core team to start a company. At this time Warner Communications was thinking of selling or disposing of Atari as it was losing a lot of money. Jack made an offer for the company by injecting $30 million – $25m from himself and $5m from associates, such as myself. Eventually the deal was struck and that is how I came to be the vice president of advanced development at Atari."

Rising to the challenge

Having switched sides in dramatic fashion, Tramiel had a new company to command in the shape of Atari Incorporated. He now needed a product that would get the firm back on its feet. Thankfully Shiraz and his team already had ideas forming. "The core team of engineers and developers were thinking of the next personal computer," Shiraz says. "The work on the ST didn't really start until Atari was actually purchased, but the main ideas of using a 32-bit processor as well as support for music and graphics were already important for us."

Shiraz duly started work on the new project codenamed 'Rock Bottom Price', or 'RBP' for short – an indication of Tramiel's desire to produce a cheap yet powerful home computer. "We moved everyone into the Atari facilities on Borregas Avenue in Sunnyvale in July 1984," says Shiraz, who had to dig into his own pockets to ensure development went smoothly. "I paid for airline tickets and hotel bills for my hardware team using my own personal credit cards and was not paid until much later. I think the real development began in August; we didn't usually get home until 11pm some nights, and sometimes it was well after midnight."

This punishing schedule was made even more demanding because Shiraz knew exactly what would happen if he failed to deliver the goods on time. "If we did not come through we would have had to close shop," he states, matter-of-factly. "You can imagine I really felt the very heavy burden of responsibility. We had no choice but to deliver a product that was superior in terms of performance and price." Amazingly, this intense pressure seemed to bring out the best in the team. "I felt very confident and comfortable that I and the team were up to the task," states Shiraz. "After all, I had a core hardware team of four engineers from Commodore that had worked for me in the past so I knew what they could do. We integrated with people from Atari and had a very small but efficient team that worked very hard to get the hardware done in record time. Somehow, although there was much pressure on us, I did not have any sleepless nights. This is because of the trust I had in the team."

The engineers at Atari originally envisaged the machine as a 'true' 32-bit computer, but eventually compromised and settled for a 32-bit



INFORMATION

Year released: 1985

Original price: £749.99 (with monochrome monitor)

Buy it now for: £10+

Associated magazines: ST Format, ST Action, Atari ST User, ST World

Why the Atari ST was great… Atari would still be remembered solely as the company that flushed the entire videogame industry down the toilet in the early-Eighties were it not for the saviour that was the ST. It may have lost the war to the Commodore Amiga, but this legendary machine was the first true 16-bit home computer and played host to such seminal games as *Dungeon Master* and *Starglider*. It was also brilliant for bedroom tunesmiths thanks to its built-in MIDI support.

COMMUNITY ATARI ST SITES TO WATCH

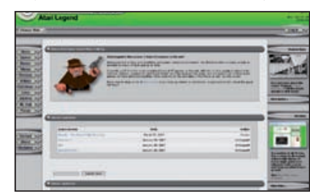
Atari Museum
www.atarimuseum.com
A robust archive backed by former Atari employees, this site has lots of info, images and other resources. It's well presented, with many sub-sections featuring unique layouts based on classic Atari hardware. Essential if you're interested in the ST and Atari in general.



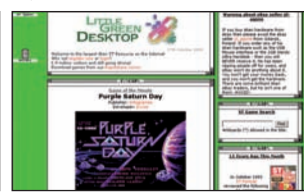
ATARI.ORG
www.atari.org
A bustling and active community, Atari.org not only contains a wealth of information but also hosts several other sub-sites, run by Atari fanatics. It doesn't look like much but is easy to navigate and is a great place to keep up to date with developments in the Atari world.



Atari Legend
www.atarilegend.com
Solely focused on keeping the memory of the ST alive, Atari Legend doesn't get updated as often as we'd like but still contains a lot of interesting content, including reviews, interviews and demos. Well worth a look should you be inquisitive about Atari's home computer.

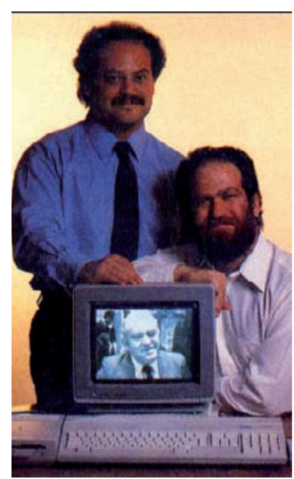


Little Green Desktop
www.atari.st
The name of this site alludes to the distinctive tint of the Atari TOS operating system; the design may hurt your eyes but the content is excellent. As well as running a spotlight on a particular game every day, it also delves back into old copies of *ST Format*.





» Borregas Avenue, Sunnyvale, California – the site of Atari's HQ during the ST years.

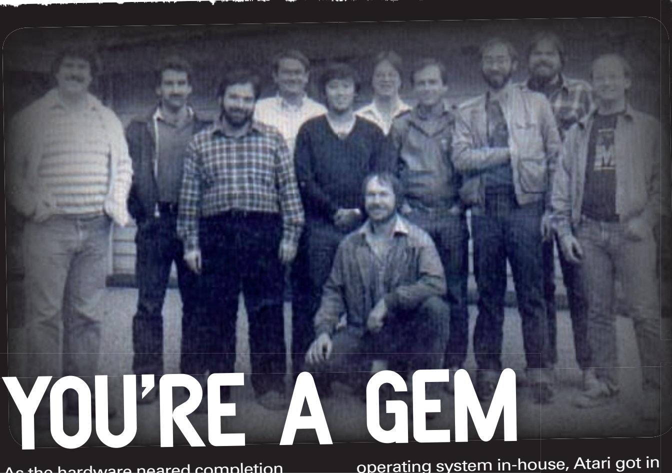












YOU'RE A GEM

As the hardware neared completion Shiraz's team naturally began to look for possible operating systems to use with the machine. "The hardware was fairly easy for us to do and we beat the Amiga team to the punch although they had started at least two years earlier," says Shiraz. "The problem we both had was how to get a modern operating system." Early on in the development of the ST, Atari was contacted by Microsoft with the suggestion that the company port Windows to its new home computer. This idea was rejected as Windows was still two years away from being finished, and given the pressing need to get the ST in shops, Atari simply could not afford to waste time. Casting aside the expensive alternative of coding an operating system in-house, Atari got in touch with Digital Research – creator of the GEM system. "Commodore's Amiga team solved the OS problem by going to the UK to get a sophisticated multi-tasking system, but for us we really had no choice but to go with Digital Research," explains Shiraz. "We came up with a deal with Gary Kildall, president and CEO of Digital Research, to licence and use GEM and to use some of his engineers to help port it on the Atari ST. We sent a team of engineers to work in Monterrey where Digital Research was located." It was a task of truly Herculean proportions, as bugs in the GEM system were still being ironed out while the porting took place, but the team (pictured above) succeeded.

VERSIONS

Atari STacy (1987)
Essentially a portable ST, this unwieldy beast ran off 12 'C' cell batteries and would grant a measly 15 minutes of use before exhausting its power supply. Ironically, it could imitate the more expensive Apple Mac Portable via emulation, and was even faster – proof that the ST's power was not to be underestimated.



Atari STE (1989)
The ST Enhanced was pretty much how it sounded – a slightly improved version of the original machine. It featured a larger colour palette, improved sound capabilities and a new graphics co-processor, but sadly few games were produced to take advantage of this new power, and the machine proved too little, too late.

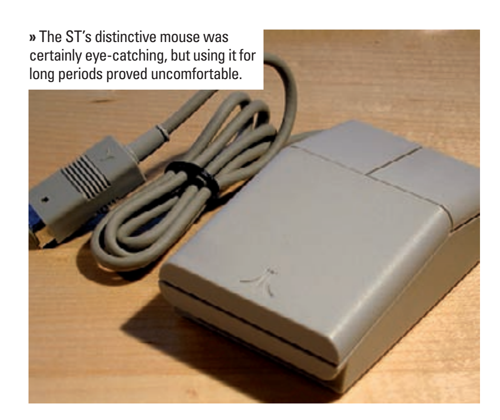


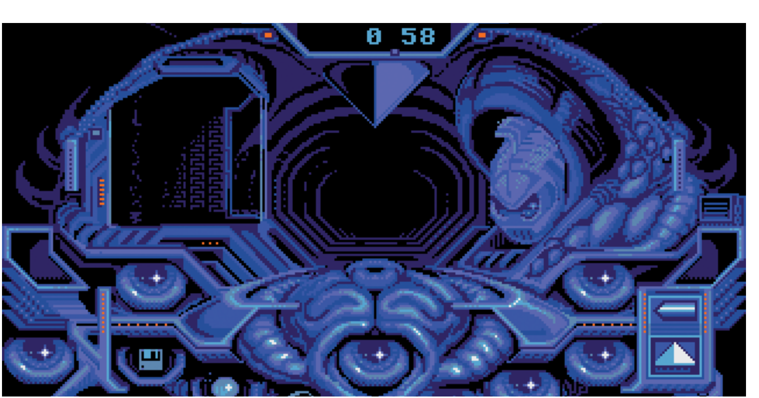
ST Book (1990)
Amazingly, the STacy wasn't a complete disaster and this led Atari to produce a successor – the ST Book. Slimmer and more portable than its forebear, the ST Book was less power-hungry because it lacked a backlit display – which naturally made it hard to use in dim light.



Atari Falcon (1992)
The final entry in Atari's home computer range, the Falcon was so hurriedly rushed to market that the casing wasn't ready for launch and so it used the 1040 ST exterior instead. Discontinued after a year, the Falcon remains a popular platform for those interested in hardware modification.




» The ST's distinctive mouse was certainly eye-catching, but using it for long periods proved uncomfortable.







» The ST's TOS (Tramiel Operating System) in all its lurid green glory.


» The man himself – Shiraz Shivji – pictured in the Eighties.

processor that communicated through a 16-bit external bus (the abbreviation 'ST' actually stands for '16/32'). "We had a meeting with the CEO of National Semiconductor, who was anxious for us to use their 32-bit NS3200 processor," remembers Shiraz. "It turned out that even though the Motorola 68000 was a quasi-32-bit chip, the performance turned out to be as good, if not better than the National Semiconductor's true 32-bit chip. Motorola had a number of parts that they could not sell as one of the parameters did not fully meet their specification, but we found that this particular parameter could be relaxed in our design and so we could use these parts that would have to be thrown away, saving both us and Motorola several million dollars." Amazingly, despite these cost-cutting measures, the ST was still able to outperform more expensive rivals. "Our design was so optimised for performance and cost that you could emulate the Apple Macintosh – if you had the Apple ROMs – and an application would run faster on the Atari ST," reveals a justifiably proud Shiraz.

As the project neared completion, Shiraz and his team started to realise just how amazing their achievement was. They had taken the ST from rough concept to final product in less than half a year, and when 85 per cent complete ST machines were shown at the CES show in 1985, it amazed the industry. "I was very proud that the team had accomplished so much in a short period of time," says Shiraz. When the machine officially launched in May, it marked the dawn of a resurgence for the previously ailing company and it speaks volumes for the popularity of the ST range that when Tramiel took Atari public in November, stock was selling for nearly triple its original price just a few months later. The ST had saved Atari from the scrapheap, and all in less than half a year.

Business or Pleasure?

It may come as a shock to learn that the man behind the ST isn't much of a gamer. "I'm not into games myself but I am quite aware of what needs to be done in the hardware to create good games," says Shiraz. "With the ST, the processor/memory bandwidth is highly optimised, leading to very fast graphical interactions. I think the entertainment software for the ST was reasonably good, but first and foremost this was going to be a consumer machine." Despite this obvious focus on business, the ST played host to some truly groundbreaking pieces of software and received sterling support from the likes of Bullfrog (*Populous*), Spectrum HoloByte (*Falcon*), FTL (*Dungeon Master*), Realtime Games (*Carrier Command*), Argonaut (*Starglider*) and David Braben (*Virus*).

The ST may have been great for games but it also proved to be a hit with musical types, too. "Right from the start we were interested in providing good musical capability," explains Shiraz. "Since we felt that the Yamaha chip in the ST was not as strong as we would have liked, we thought that we should put in an interface for external music access. We found that we could do it rather inexpensively using a Motorola serial chip and a connector for the MIDI-port. The total cost for this was 75 cents. The biggest problem was finding the space for connectors in the back. Musicians found it a great and inexpensive MIDI instrument."

Sadly, it didn't take long for Commodore's Amiga to overshadow the ST and as the Eighties drew to a close Atari's machine was starting to trail its opponent. US sales dropped off dramatically, but in Europe the machine remained a healthy success. Shiraz has his own theory on this disparity: "The reason is very simple – distribution channels. Atari did not have any distribution channels to speak of in the US. In Europe, on the other hand, we had a great cadre of ex-Commodore people and dealers that we could use."

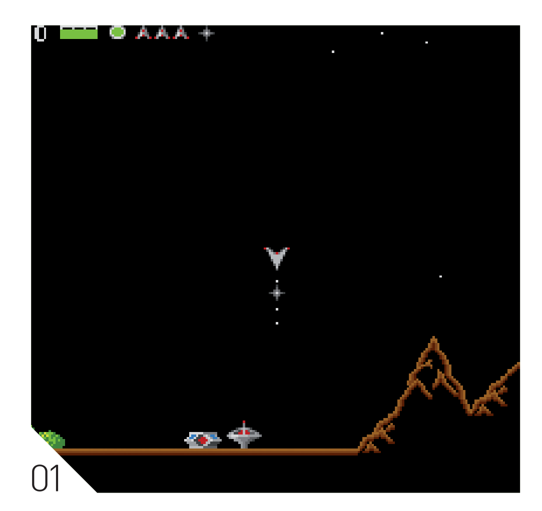
Ironically, considering they were locked in battle for much of their life spans, the Atari and Amiga are intrinsically linked. "Jay Miner was at Atari in the old days and was involved in the design of their products," explains Shiraz. "He left Atari to design the Amiga. Atari had funded some of this effort and had an option to buy the Amiga, and when we took over in July 1984 the first order of business was to decide what to do with this option. The problem was that the Amiga was not quite ready and would need a lot of money to fully acquire. We decided to pass, but this put enormous pressure on our own development team. Commodore, on the other hand, did not have an internally developed 32-bit graphics-oriented machine or the confidence to develop anything internally, so they ended up buying the Amiga for between $25-$30 million and spent a further $20 million or so on it, releasing it a little after the launch of the ST. The roles were reversed – the Atari ST has a Commodore pedigree, while the Commodore Amiga has an Atari pedigree!"

To claw back some of the market, Atari sanctioned the release of an updated machine, dubbed the STE (with the E standing for Enhanced). Sadly the ploy failed and few programs took advantage of the STE's augmented capabilities. Shiraz's involvement was minimal: "I was on my way out of Atari at that time. I left in 1989." Other versions of the computer were also put into production, including the ambitious Atari TT and Falcon, but neither of these met with any degree of success. "The problem was that Motorola had lost the processor battle," comments Shiraz. "The TT was based on the Motorola 68030, a successor to the 68000. This processor was clearly inferior to the 386 and 486 from Intel. There was no way Atari could compete with Motorola processors." In 1993, Atari pulled the plug on its range of home computers in order to focus its attention on the ill-fated Jaguar console and sank once again into a period of recession.

Having created one of the quintessential home computer platforms of the past 20 years, what memories does Shiraz hold dearest after all this time? "The teamwork was outstanding," he replies. "Even today most of the members of the team look very fondly at that time as the best years of their lives. The total hardware development was done in the space of five months. I have not seen such an accelerated development for such a complex project in that amount of time."

PERFECT TEN GAMES

There were so many great games released for Atari's ST. Sure, many of them also appeared on its more powerful Commodore rival, but, in all honesty, many of the games featured here proved to be as good, if not better than the Amiga versions. If we've missed any classics, why not submit them in the form of a profile at www.retrogamer.net


01

OIDS

» **RELEASED:** 1987
» **PUBLISHER:** FTL GAMES
» **CREATED BY:** DAN HEWITT
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** CHAOS STRIKES BACK

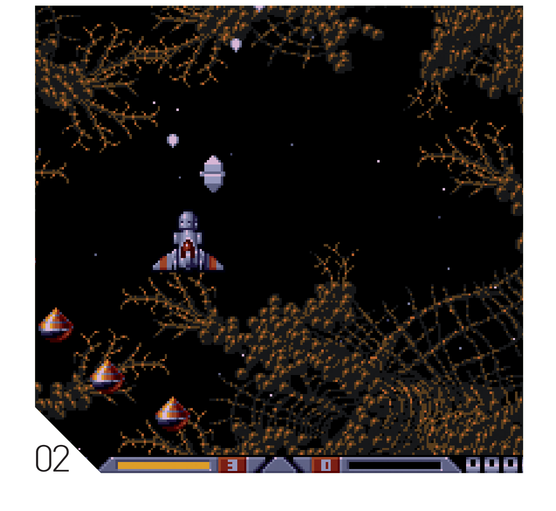
01 **We're willing to** put our neck on the line here and say that this *Thrust*-clone by Dan Hewitt is probably the best game of its type. Piloting a triangular V-wing fighter, your job was to travel to a variety of hostile planets to liberate the titular Oids – the planets' imprisoned android slaves. However, working against you was the strong gravitational pull of the planet's surface, which attempted to drag you into its sharp, mountainous maws. On top of this you also had to deal with hordes of rocket-spewing enemy spacecraft and your ship's rapidly depleting fuel gauge. The icing on the cake came in the form of a nifty level editor that allowed you to effortlessly mock up your own planets and galaxies to play through.

XENON 2: MEGABLAST

» **RELEASED:** 1989
» **PUBLISHER:** IMAGEWORKS
» **CREATED BY:** MARTIN DAY
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** CADAVER

02 **The Bitmap Brothers'** sequel to its seminal shoot-'em-up franchise was entrenched in trippy colours, eye-blistering visuals and a punchy soundtrack by acid-house musician Tim Simenon (aka Bomb The Bass). Playing slightly differently to its predecessor, however, *Xenon 2: Megablast* retained the vertical shooter ideals of the original, but would drop the vehicle-shifting and arena-setting for an unusual underwater backdrop, plus a unique vertical-scrolling perspective that allowed players to pull the camera backwards. While *Xenon 2: Megablast* feels somewhat sedate when compared to some of its Eastern contemporaries, the game still proves to be a great blast, and this Atari ST port is just sublime.




02

MIDWINTER

» **RELEASED:** 1989
» **PUBLISHER:** RAINBIRD
» **CREATED BY:** MIKE SINGLETON
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** WAR IN MIDDLE EARTH

03 **Many people are** put off by *Midwinter*'s complexity, but those who invest time into the game are greatly rewarded. Set in Midwinter, a sprawling island forged inside harsh snowy wastelands, the player must try to stop a maniacal general from overthrowing the snowy islet. Playing the role of a police officer, your mission is to explore the island, evade enemy troops, and enlist the support of the islanders. Played out through a first-person perspective, *Midwinter*'s harsh and bitter environment won't be to everyone's tastes, but it's definitely a place that every ST owner and strategy fan should take time to visit.

TIME BANDIT

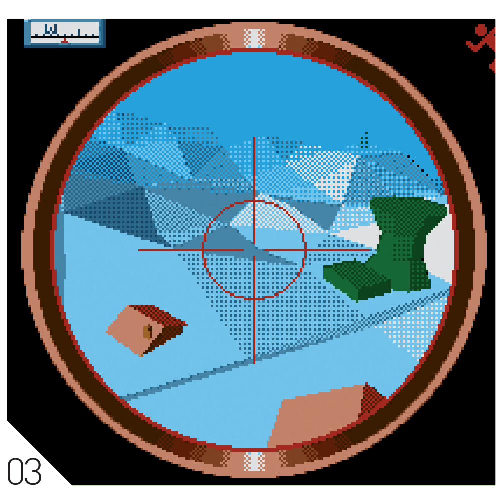
» **RELEASED:** 1986
» **PUBLISHER:** MICRODEAL
» **CREATED BY:** BILL DUNLEVY AND HARRY LAFNEAR
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** 8 BALL

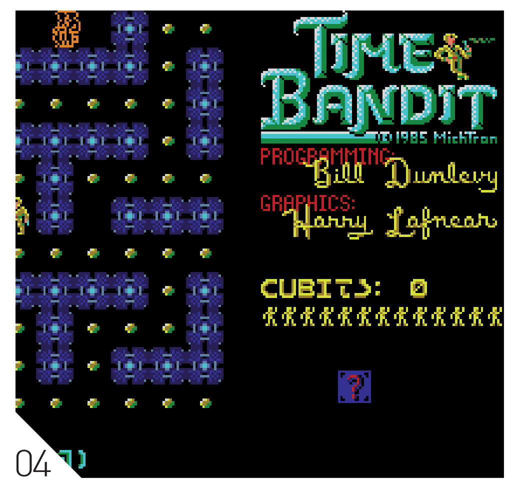
04 **If you're after** a game that fuses elements of *Pac-Man*, *Bomberman*, *Gauntlet*, time travel and text adventures then you should track down *Time Bandit*. Debuting on the Tandy TRS-80 before being ported to the Amiga and ST, its authors, Bill Dunlevy and Harry Lafnear, set about refining it brilliantly with the extra power. As a treasure hunter, your mission was to travel to 16 distinct worlds to collect valuable artefacts. One of its neat touches is that many of the levels pay homage to classic arcade games. 'Shadowland', for example, is clearly a send-up of Namco's pill-chomping maze classic, *Pac-Man*.

NO SECOND PRIZE

» **RELEASED:** 1992
» **PUBLISHER:** THALION
» **CREATED BY:** CHRIS JUNGEN
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** ATOMIX

05 **No Second Prize** was a slick 3D motorbike racer that was clearly a few hundred CCs ahead of its contemporaries. The game featured six distinct drivers, 20 well-designed and diverse tracks and some staggeringly smooth scrolling. Bolstering its lavishness were its neat vector 3D graphics, a finely tuned difficulty curve and a sublime electro-rock soundtrack by one of the most established composers in the ST scene – oh and you could edit your own replays after each race, too (it was one of the earliest games to let you do that). If you're looking for a great alternative to the excellent *Stunt Car Racer* then you should really seek out this overlooked ST classic.

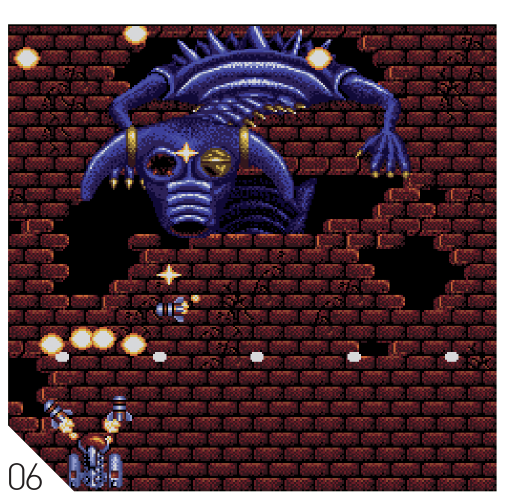

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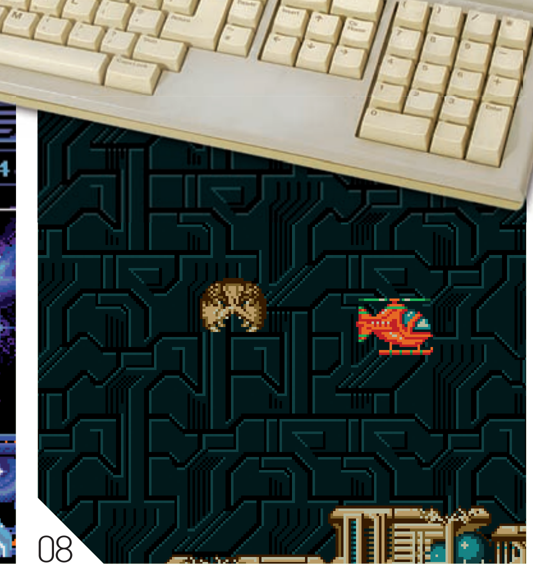


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08

LETHAL XCESS

» **RELEASED:** 1991
» **PUBLISHER:** ECLIPSE SOFTWARE
» **CREATED BY:** CLAUS FREIN
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** STONE AGE

06 **Yet another ST** classic, *Lethal Xcess* is a masterpiece on the ST that pushes its technical boundaries to the limits. While there exist far better examples of the top-down vertical shooter (we've got a making-of one of them in this issue), *Lethal Xcess*'s greedy looking sprites, and frenetic kill-everything-that-moves gameplay, struck a chord with ST owners. A sequel to another underappreciated top-down vertical shooter called *Wings Of Death*, *Lethal Xcess* boasted a neat two-player mode and a novel power-up system that allowed you to power up your power-ups. But even with a pal and a super weapon this game is harder than pure maths.

CAPTAIN BLOOD

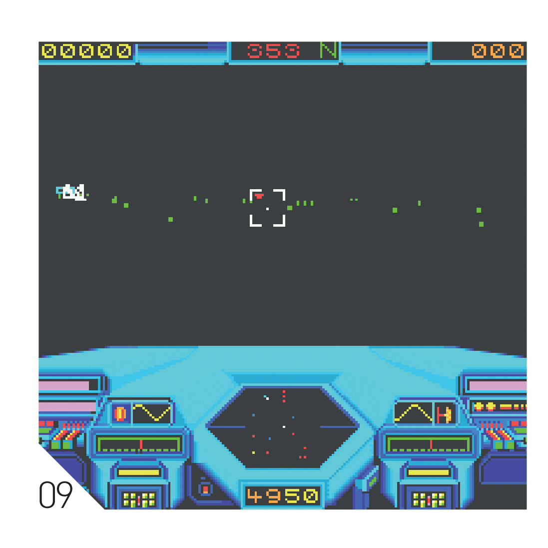
» **RELEASED:** 1988
» **PUBLISHER:** MINDSCAPE
» **CREATED BY:** PHILIPPE ULRICH
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** GET DEXTER

07 **The prospect of** getting sucked into your own videogame is one that few programmers – other than the team behind *Rumble Roses* – would relish, but this is the dilemma facing Captain Blood, and that's only the start of his problems. After being zapped inside his own binary, Blood discovers he's been cloned and each of his doppelgangers are leeching off his life-mojo. It's up to you to travel the galaxy, decipher peculiar alien text and track your targets before it's too late. A mix of *Tron* and *Blade Runner*, with some Giger-style imagery and Jean Michel Jarre tunes thrown in, *Captain Blood* is a gloomy but atmospheric RPG classic.

BLOOD MONEY

» **RELEASED:** 1989
» **PUBLISHER:** PSYGNOSIS
» **CREATED BY:** DAVID JONES
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** DEEP SPACE

08 **We were toying** with putting *R-Type* on this list, but felt David Jones' *Blood Money* was the marginally better side-scrolling blaster. It's smoother, looks amazing and has an innovative gameplay mechanic where certain enemies would rather pilfer your pockets than cause you damage. Anyway, sticking with the *R-Type* comparisons, *Blood Money* can best be described as Irem's game but set underwater. Controlling a chubby looking red submarine, your mission was simple: avoid hitting the walls, shoot anything that moves, collect the coins and kit out your vessel with all manner of power-ups. *Blood Money* is simple, sublime fun. Be warned, it's no doozey.



09

STARGLIDER

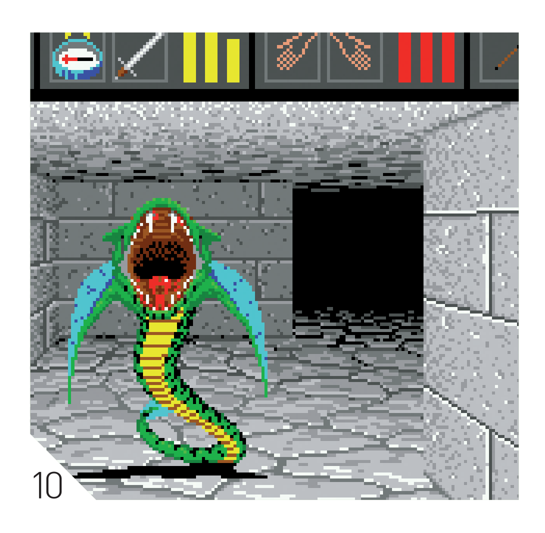
» **RELEASED:** 1986
» **PUBLISHER:** ARGONAUT SOFTWARE
» **CREATED BY:** JEREMY SAN
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** STARFOX

09 **One of Argonaut** Software's earliest games, *Starglider* clearly has the company's 3D vector stamp all over it. Your mission was to traverse the planet of Novenia and blast away any and all alien craft from inside your AGAV or Airborne Ground Attack Vehicle. Inspired by Jeremy San's love of Atari's brilliant *Star Wars* coin-op, *Starglider* became a high-profile release and a big hit after it appeared in cut-down-for-telly-competition form on popular children's television show *Get Fresh*. Packed with a 64-page novella, which was scribed by fiction author James Follett, *Starglider* was an engaging space blaster that slotted nicely between the fast-paced arcade action of *Star Wars* and the immersive reaches of the more strategic *Elite*.

DUNGEON MASTER

» **RELEASED:** 1987
» **PUBLISHER:** FTL GAMES
» **CREATED BY:** DENNIS WALKER, DOUG BELL
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** HYDROFOOL

10 A sprawling and flawlessly designed first-person RPG that oozed atmosphere, bagged itself a trove of awards and went on to influence a swathe of classic RPG brilliance, including the likes of *Lands Of Lore* and *Eye Of The Beholder*. The game is a brilliant portent of 3D labyrinthine levels, wonderfully imaginative creature designs and accessible RPG elements. It's brilliantly intuitive mouse-controlled interface, glorious colourful visuals, fantastic strident score and real-time combat, helped to make it a huge success around the world. The game has since spawned four sequels, with the latter, *Dungeon Master Nexus*, finding an exclusive release on the Sega Saturn, a game that never found a release outside of Japan.


10

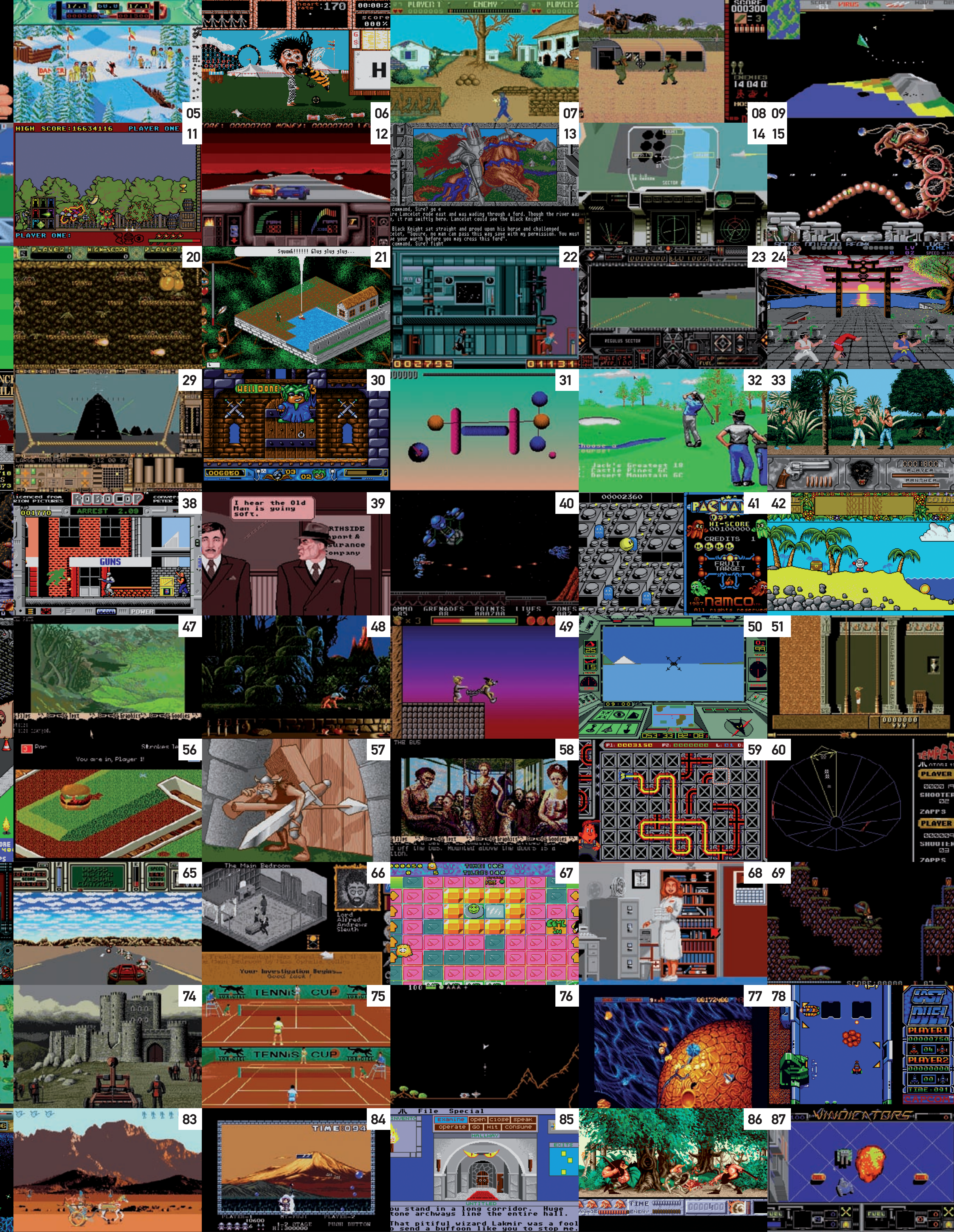


ATARI ST and the rest...

Often seen as a poor man's Amiga, the Atari ST nevertheless had a fantastic assortment of games available for it. Here then is a selection of some of its very best and worst titles.

1 B.A.T.
2 QUESTRON
3 HARLEY-DAVIDSON
4 TECHNOCOP
5 ADVANCED SKI SIMULATOR
6 WEIRD DREAMS
7 CABAL
8 OPERATION WOLF
9 ZARCH
10 ENCOUNTER
11 BLACK LAMP
12 OVERLANDER
13 LANCELOT
14 F29 RETALIATOR
15 R-TYPE
16 ULTIMA VI: THE FALSE PROPHET
17 ARMALYTE
18 NEBULUS
19 GOAL!
20 YOLANDA
21 THE ADVENTURES OF ROBIN HOOD
22 TINTIN ON THE MOON
23 DARK SIDE
24 IK+
25 THE SENTINEL
26 KID GLOVES
27 VERMINATOR
28 LICENCE TO KILL
29 PHANTASM
30 VIDEO KID
31 E-MOTION
32 JACK NICKLAUS CHAMPIONSHIP GOLF
33 WILD STREETS
34 CARRIER COMMAND
35 NITRO
36 THRUST
37 XENON 2: MEGABLAST
38 ROBOCOP
39 THE KING OF CHICAGO
40 EXOLON
41 PAC-MANIA
42 TREASURE ISLAND DIZZY
43 9 LIVES
44 CADAVER
45 ONSLAUGHT
46 WARLOCK
47 THE PAWN
48 FRED
49 SLEEPWALKER
50 ARCTIC FOX
51 EYE OF HORUS
52 TRACKER
53 WARHAWK
54 LAST NINJA 3
55 NEIGHBOURS
56 ZANY GOLF
57 HEIMDALL
58 JINXTER
59 PIPE MANIA
60 TEMPEST
61 SHINOBI
62 WANTED
63 SPINDIZZY WORLDS
64 ROGUE TROOPER
65 FIRE & FORGET II
66 MURDER
67 SUPER SKWEEK
68 LIFE AND DEATH
69 FLOOD
70 CORPORATION
71 NORTHSTAR
72 HELTER SKELTER
73 TNT
74 DEFENDER OF THE CROWN
75 TENNIS CUP
76 OIDS
77 STARDUST
78 LAST DUEL
79 GAUNTLET
80 KNIGHTMARE
81 WACKY DARTS
82 JAWS
83 DAY OF THE PHARAOH
84 PANG
85 SHADOWGATE
86 IVANHOE
87 VINDICATORS

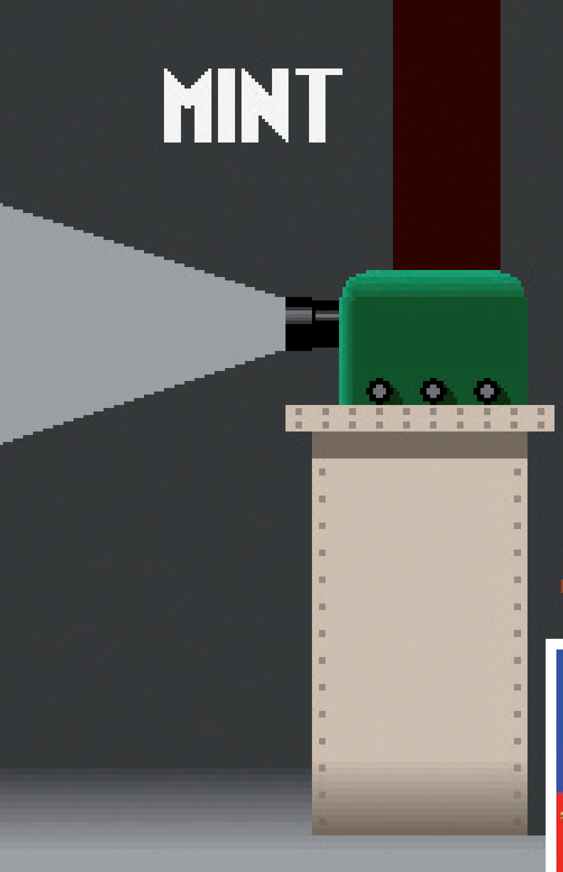
Special thanks to AtariLegend.com


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WHY YOU MUST PLAY...

BONANZA BROS.

FORGET GTA IV, SEGA WAS PUTTING US INTO THE SHOES OF BANK ROBBERS AS FAR BACK AS 1990. WE JOIN THE VIRTUAL EMBODIMENT OF THE KRAYS AND THE CHUCKLE BROTHERS AS THEY SECURE ONE HELL OF A BONANZA





» A good way to tell whether the droids have spotted you is to keep an eye on the speech bubbles that appear above their head.

Robots nicking from other robots – that's the raw underpinning premise of *Bonanza Bros.*. Mobo and Robo, two brightly coloured robots that look like antibiotics are tasked with stealing rare antiquities from various high-security locales.

Some of these locations would be common to the typical robber, such as banks, casinos and jewellery stores, whereas others would be less recognisable, such as an underground bunker, a hotel and a yellow pyramid. Whether the pair's larceny is righteous is never really explained during the game, although it would be fair to say – considering the fact that the duo seem to be a) breaking and entering, b) avoiding and shooting at security guards, and c) find themselves thrown in the clink if they're caught – that it likely teeters on the side of amoral. In fact, their true remit has been debated ever since the game's conception. The original Japanese version depicts the brothers as two thieves. However, for the game's Western release, Sega cleaned up their act and transformed the bungling pair into high-profile security-alarm testers.



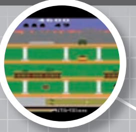
» Our hero thinks he can avoid a jail term by burying his head in the sand.

Whatever version you happen to be playing, the game does its best to paint our heroes' actions in a comical light. Society and its animals are depicted as bumbling synthetics living in a world that's painted in ray-traced Art Deco. It's a shame that owing to the frantic and often madcap nature of its gameplay, many people bypass the amazing amount of detail that Sega imparted into the game.

Bonanza Bros. is an action/stealth game at heart. The trick is timing and, if you're playing through it in co-operative mode, working



TIMELINE



KEYSTONE KAPERS
Version Featured: Intellivision
Year Released: 1983



MANIC MINER
Version Featured: Spectrum
Year Released: 1983



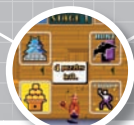
BLAGGER
Version Featured: CPC
Year Released: 1983

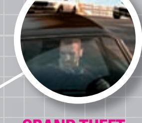
SON OF BLAGGER
Version Featured: C64
Year Released: 1983



PUZZLE & ACTION: TANT-R
Version Featured: Arcade
Year Released: 1992

PUZZLE & ACTION: ICHIDANT-R
Version Featured: Arcade
Year Released: 1994





GRAND THEFT AUTO IV
Version Featured: 360
Year Released: 2008

THE CONVERSIONS



1. MASTER SYSTEM
Like the Mega Drive port you can set your lives and time limit. The SMS version is the only one that doesn't show Robo and Mobo escaping and you only get a quick look at the map before the start of each stage. On all the 8-bit ports you don't drop your loot when you take a hit, which proves pretty helpful.

2. MEGA DRIVE
It may not have the aesthetics of the arcade game, but this is still a pretty faithful port. The MD game keeps the in-game map in game and the level layouts seem pretty on the money. Both SMS and MD ports play around with the backstory once again. This time our heroes are trying to take down some counterfeiters.

3. AMIGA
The Amiga version looks and plays similarly to the Mega Drive's. The map is visible, Mobo and Robo drop their haul whenever they get hit, and all the enemies, objects, colours and cut-scenes seem to have been wholesaled across, too. It's a great conversion that sits a respectable second place on this list.

4. CPC
The CPC version of *Bonanza Bros.* isn't bad. Marred by the same inaccurate controls that spoil the Speccy port, what this version does have is the gorgeous CPC colour palette, which lends a nice level of detail to the sprites. This added definition makes the game prettier, and escalates it slightly above the Speccy version.

5. C64
The C64 port of *Bonanza Bros.* is a marriage of the CPC's colourful sprites and the Spectrum's smooth scrolling. However, the C64 version doesn't find your characters jumping wildly in the air, and their progress is charted on an in-game map – making things a lot easier. Sadly, the C64 port is stupidly easy, too.

6. SPECTRUM
Apart from the annoying controls, this isn't bad. The action is smooth and the character sprites are well drawn, but they're sometimes hard to distinguish against the grey backgrounds. While scaled down a bit, the levels do keep the coin-op arrangement – which is good, as there are no maps in this version.

logically as a team. Using the maps to methodically negotiate your way around the levels and collecting the valuables quickly, with as little confrontation from the patrolling guards, is the key to a rising unlawful-rank.

The game also has a number of neat little features. Occasionally the guards can be seen dozing, meaning our antiheroes would need to tread carefully and keep a beady eye out for comedy rakes and precariously positioned cans that, if touched, would cause them to land on the ground with a thump or get smacked in the face with a clap. It's handy then that as well as stealth and sneakiness, Mobo and Robo also have the ability to stun the guards with funnel-shaped handguns so they can walk past them unperturbed.

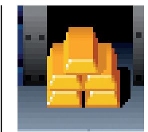
Sega also permeated the robbery by adding neat bonus stages that found Mobo and Robo collecting gold bars, while avoiding the exposure of prowling spotlights. Failure to clean the screen of all the loot before getting captured inside the incandescent glare of the lights resulted in the duo getting a very graphic billy-club-pummelling by the game's overly aggressive security guards.

While there was only really one official *Bonanza Bros.* caper, the brothers would later receive two odd puzzle arcade spin-offs: *Puzzle & Action: Tant-R* and *Puzzle & Action: Ichidant-R*. Oddly, the theme of the games took on a weird *Sherlock Holmes* and Medieval mixture, and the sub-games played out similarly to the kind of analytical teasers seen in the *Brain Training* series. So, while the Bonanza Brothers may not have escalated to mascot-type stature, or gained huge critical acclaim for Sega, they did manage to keep their noses clean when putting their names to videogames. If you've yet to experience this criminally underplayed Sega classic then you really should try to track it down. Beg, cheat or steal a copy (we're joking of course).

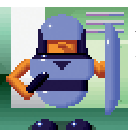
THINGS TO LOOK OUT FOR



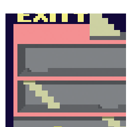
CANS
Look out for obstructions on the floor. If Mobo or Robo walk over them it usually results in the lazy guards being alerted.



LOOT
The treasures vary from level to level. One minute you're collecting gold, the next you're lifting a nice yellow sweatshirt.



GUARDS
There are a few variations of guards, but these blue armed-guards are the most common enemy.



MAP
The map is your friend. It doesn't show you where the guards are, but it shows you where the loot and exit can be found.

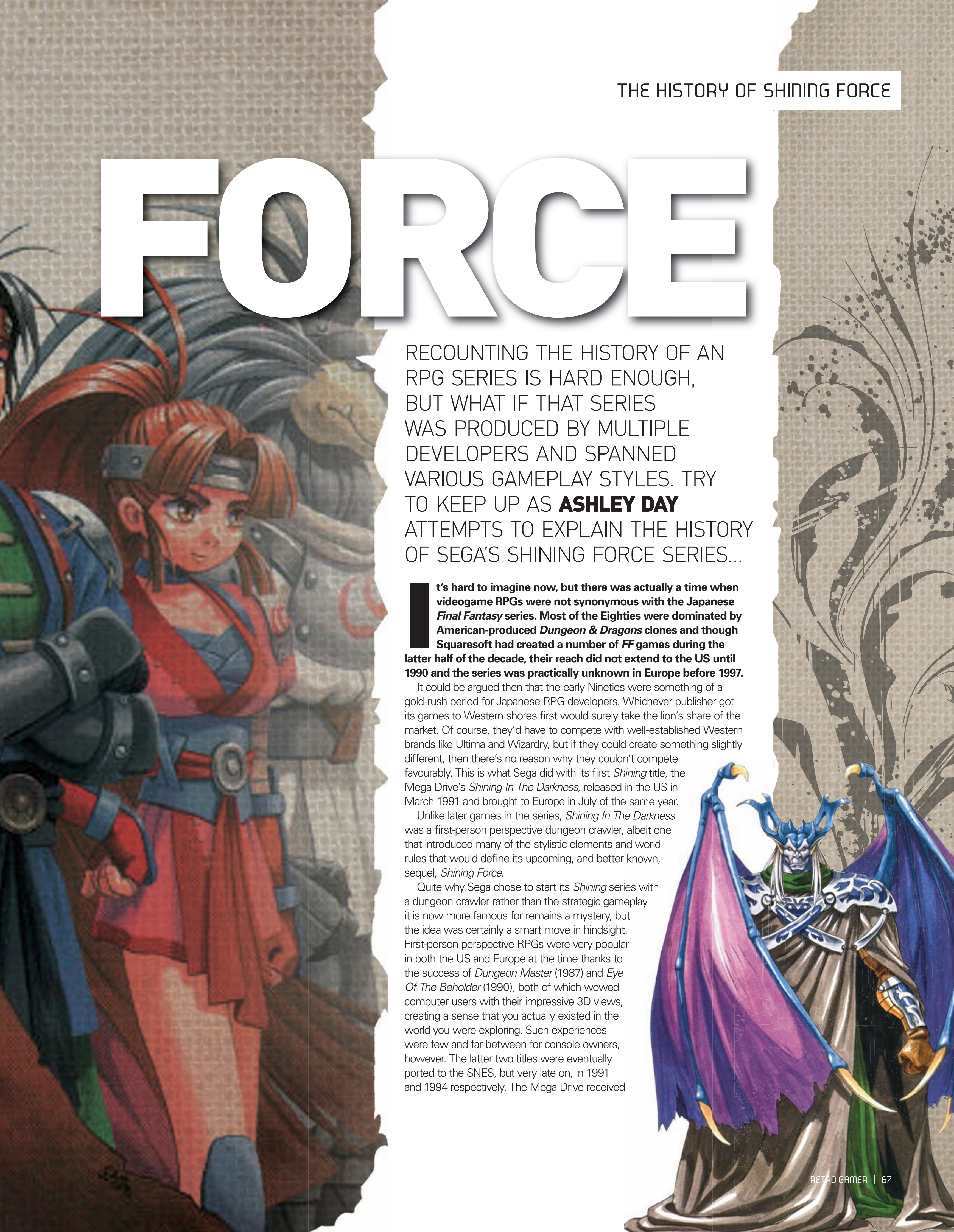
TRY THIS NEXT

KEYSTONE KAPERS
Owing to an uncanny visual likeness, it wouldn't be completely idiotic to say that *Bonanza Bros.* could be seen as a spiritual predecessor to *Keystone Kapers*. Activision's game, however, finds you very much on the right side of the law. Placing you in the role of officer Keystone Kelly, you're tasked with trying to apprehend an escaping perp inside a multi-level shopping mall. Rather than collecting and escaping, *Keystone* finds you avoiding obstructions and trying to capture the absconding convict before he reaches the rooftops and makes his escape. Think *Chase H.Q.* set in Bluewater Shopping Centre.



The History Of SHINING





FORCE

RECOUNTING THE HISTORY OF AN RPG SERIES IS HARD ENOUGH, BUT WHAT IF THAT SERIES WAS PRODUCED BY MULTIPLE DEVELOPERS AND SPANNED VARIOUS GAMEPLAY STYLES. TRY TO KEEP UP AS **ASHLEY DAY** ATTEMPTS TO EXPLAIN THE HISTORY OF SEGA'S SHINING FORCE SERIES...

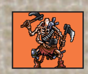
It's hard to imagine now, but there was actually a time when videogame RPGs were not synonymous with the Japanese *Final Fantasy* series. Most of the Eighties were dominated by American-produced *Dungeon & Dragons* clones and though Squaresoft had created a number of *FF* games during the latter half of the decade, their reach did not extend to the US until 1990 and the series was practically unknown in Europe before 1997.

It could be argued then that the early Nineties were something of a gold-rush period for Japanese RPG developers. Whichever publisher got its games to Western shores first would surely take the lion's share of the market. Of course, they'd have to compete with well-established Western brands like Ultima and Wizardry, but if they could create something slightly different, then there's no reason why they couldn't compete favourably. This is what Sega did with its first *Shining* title, the Mega Drive's *Shining In The Darkness*, released in the US in March 1991 and brought to Europe in July of the same year.

Unlike later games in the series, *Shining In The Darkness* was a first-person perspective dungeon crawler, albeit one that introduced many of the stylistic elements and world rules that would define its upcoming, and better known, sequel, *Shining Force*.

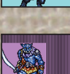
Quite why Sega chose to start its *Shining* series with a dungeon crawler rather than the strategic gameplay it is now more famous for remains a mystery, but the idea was certainly a smart move in hindsight. First-person perspective RPGs were very popular in both the US and Europe at the time thanks to the success of *Dungeon Master* (1987) and *Eye Of The Beholder* (1990), both of which wowed computer users with their impressive 3D views, creating a sense that you actually existed in the world you were exploring. Such experiences were few and far between for console owners, however. The latter two titles were eventually ported to the SNES, but very late on, in 1991 and 1994 respectively. The Mega Drive received

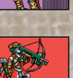
ROGUE'S GALLERY

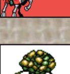

ARMED SKELETON
Shining Force
1992


BARBARA
Shining Force CD
1994


CHAOS DRAGON
Shining Force II
1993

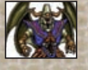

DANTOM
Shining Force CD
1994


BOWRIDER
Shining Force
1992


DEATH BALLOON
Shining Force CD
1994


EDMOND
Shining Force CD
1994


DARK SMOKE
Shining Force II
1993

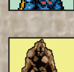

IOM
Shining Force CD
1994


DARKSOL
Shining Force
1992


SOLO
Shining Force CD
1994

EVIL BEAST
Shining Force II
1993


BAZOO
Shining Force CD
1994


GOLEM
Shining Force
1992


DEAD WOLDOL
Shining Force CD
1994


ODD EYE
Shining Force II
1993

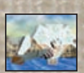

DEMON MASTER
Shining Force CD
1994


YASHA
Shining Force III
1997


GORDON
Shining Force CD
1994


LASER EYE
Shining Force
1992


MAGICAL MUSHROOM
Shining Force CD
1994


COLOSSUS
Shining Force III
1997


REAPER
Shining Force II
1993


WARDERER
Shining Force CD
1994


GALM
Shining Force III
1997

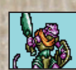

ZOMBIE
Shining Force
1992


BISHOP
Shining Force CD
1994

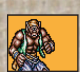

ZEON
Shining Force II
1993

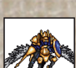

SPIRIEL
Shining Force III
1997


DEADLY BORN
Shining Force CD
1994

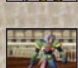

DRAGONEWT
Shining Force CD
1994


FIALE
Shining Force III
1997

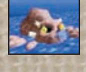

CYCLOPS
Shining Force II
1993


HAWKMAN
Shining Force CD
1994


CHIMAERA
Shining Force
1992


ARRAWNT
Shining Force III
1997


SKULL KNIGHT
Shining Force CD
1994


OCTOPUS
Shining Force III
1997


DEVIL GRIFFIN
Shining Force II
1993


DARK DRAGON
Shining Force
1992


WOLDOL
Shining Force CD
1994


HYDRA
Shining Force II
1993


ICE WORM
Shining Force
1992


ORC
Shining Force II
1993


MINOTAUR
Shining Force
1992

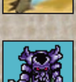

SHAMAN
Shining Force II
1993

BLUE DRAGON
Shining Force
1992


VANDAL
Shining Force III
1997


DARK BISHOP
Shining Force II
1993


DARK DWARF
Shining Force
1992


SAND WORM
Shining Force III
1997

DURAHAN
Shining Force
1992


KRAKEN
Shining Force II
1993


KANE
Shining Force
1992

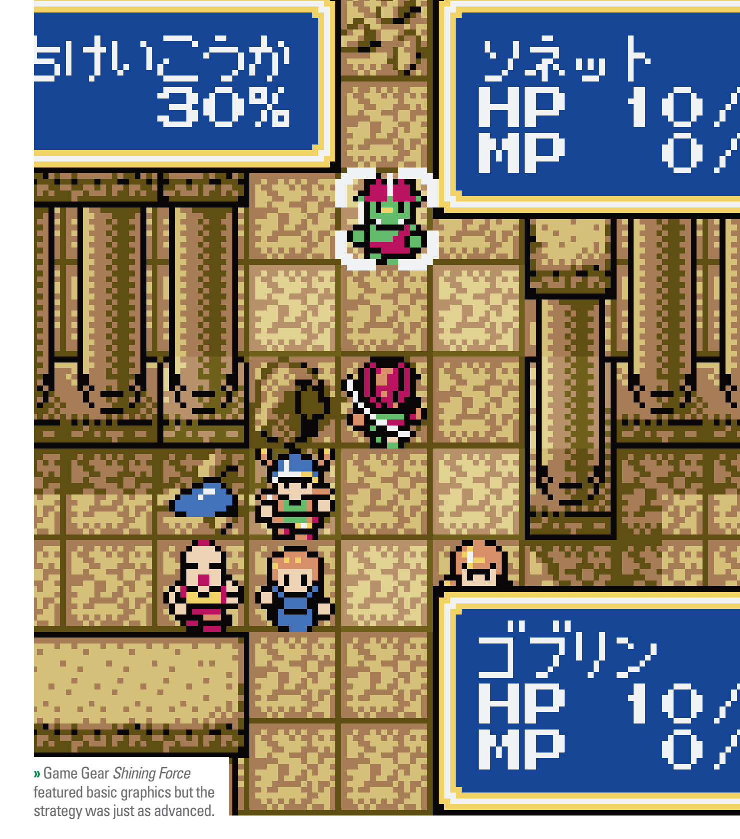
MASKED MONK
Shining Force III
1997


RAT
Shining Force II
1993


TORCH EYE
Shining Force
1992


DESSHEREN
Shining Force III
1997

TAROS
Shining Force II
1993



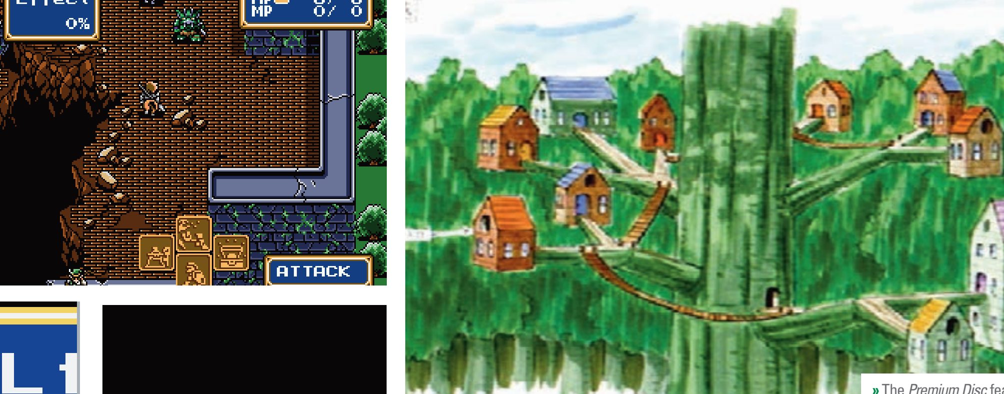
» Game Gear *Shining Force* featured basic graphics but the strategy was just as advanced.

neither game, which made the existence of *Shining In The Darkness* very attractive indeed for RPG-loving Sega fans.

Shining In The Darkness cleverly took a sub-genre that was familiar to many Westerners, but added a distinctly Japanese console-centric spin to make the game feel more attractive than its forebears. The first of these changes was the highly simplified control scheme.

Most Western first-person RPGs (FPRPG) of the time originated on the PC, Mac and Amiga and made full use of their keyboard and mouse controls. From the perspective of a console gamer they were overcomplicated interfaces that discouraged anyone but the most hardcore computer gamer. Sega's solution to this problem was typically elegant. Although it was possible to make an awful lot of commands in the game, those instructions were organised into four simple sub-categories, arranged on the screen as four squares, each with an animation that showed what the command would do. The pictures themselves were selected with a simple tap of the D-pad, either up, down, left or right depending on where in the cross formation the picture appeared (see screenshots for examples). The result was a game that offered all of the complexity and depth you would expect from an RPG of the time, but with a control scheme that removed the daunting learning curve that other examples suffered from.

Sega's other secret weapon for *Shining In The Darkness* was the world and characters of the game itself. Where most Western RPGs presented their own interpretation of the *Dungeons & Dragons* universe, which was in turn cribbed from Tolkien, Sega came along and took a very Japanese approach to designing its fantasy. Though most of the characters fell into the generic 'swords and sorcery' archetype, they were drawn in a softer more anime-like style that, while considered generic in Japan, were a step aside from the norm in the US and Europe at that time. Many of the inhabitants of the *Shining* world – dwarves, elves, gnomes – were familiar to fans of the genre but others were less expected. Early on in the game the player



» The *Premium Disc* features lots of lovely concept art, like the one shown here.



» Attractive attack animations have always been a defining feature of *Shining Force*.

"Shining In The Darkness took a sub-genre that was familiar to Westerners, but added a Japanese spin to it"

happens upon a noisy inn (which, in a nice touch, gets nosier as you approach it) only to find inside, a fully dressed wolfman casually leaning against the bar, sipping a pint of ale. Such sights were not common at the time and immediately set the *Shining* world apart from other RPGs as something quite peculiar and unique. This early encounter at the inn fostered a desire in the player to explore the rest of the game's world to see what other strange and exotic sights could be discovered. It was all the encouragement they needed to brave the unknown dungeons and fearsome battles that awaited them.

Sales figures are extremely hard to find for Japanese games of the 16-bit era, but we have to assume that *Shining In The Darkness* was a success because it wasn't too long before Sega requested a sequel and decided to keep exactly the same creative team behind *Darkness* on the project. That team was a very small internal studio called Sonic Co (not to be confused with Sonic Team), which consisted of just four people. Two of these were brothers, Shugo and Hiroyuki Takahashi plus Yasuhiro Taguchi and a secretary. The Takahashis were the brains behind the project, creating the fictional *Shining* world, as well as the story and gameplay of *Darkness*, while Taguchi was, according to the game's credits, responsible for the 'special effects'. For the rest of the game's development, Sonic Co contracted some of the work to a handful of individuals at the newly formed Climax, an independent developer that continues to work closely with Sega to this day.

For the sequel, Sonic and Climax continued to work together, ensuring a consistent style and vision between the two games, despite their different types of gameplay. Released in 1992 (1993 in Europe) and titled *Shining Force*, the sequel was a tactical RPG, of which there had been very few released at the time. The intended style of gameplay was similar to that of Nintendo's own *Famicom Wars* (1988) and *Fire Emblem* (1990), the player taking control of a great army and moving each unit around the battlefield like pieces on a chessboard.

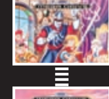
Yet Nintendo's pioneering games had suffered due to the lack of power in the Famicom (NES). The units in both games used such small sprites, making it impossible to differentiate one from the other aside from simple denotations of rank and role. They were all essentially pawns, or cannon fodder if you like. *Shining Force*, however, had the advanced power of the Mega Drive behind it and could show its units in much more detail. These were no longer just a collection of pixels you would send marching to their doom. They were all individual characters with distinct features and their own carefully written backstories and motivations. And though death had little consequence beyond reducing the Force's number, and therefore making the battles harder, the individual personalities of these characters almost encouraged you to take better care of them.

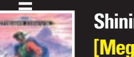
The man behind the design of *Shining Force*'s characters was Yoshitaka Tamaki, who had also worked on *Shining In The Darkness* as a planner. Tamaki admired what he calls the 'melting pot of races' in *Darkness* and set about creating more weird and wonderful creatures to populate the unique *Shining* world. Some of these were necessary to the gameplay, such as the half-horse/half-man Centaurs that could cover more ground than a normal soldier, or the Bird Knights who could fly over water and crevasses. Others seemed to be created for their aesthetic qualities, such as the peaceful-looking Kyantol, which made for suitable healing characters and bore some resemblance to the Gelflings of Jim Henson's *The Dark Crystal*. And then there's Jogurt – a rodent-like creature wearing flying goggles – a test character, designed for fun but never intended to be a part of the game. The developers loved him so much, however, that he was hidden within *Shining Force* as a secret character and made several more cameo appearances throughout the rest of the series.

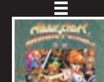
Populated with interesting characters and using a style of gameplay that was relatively unknown in the West, *Shining Force* was a huge hit with Mega Drive owners. The reasons for this are many. The

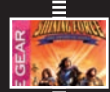


TIMELINE


Shining In The Darkness
[Mega Drive, 1991]


Shining Force
[Mega Drive, 1992]


Shining Force Gaiden
[Game Gear, 1992]


Shining Force Gaiden II: Sword Of Hajya
[Game Gear, 1993]

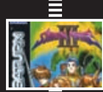

Shining Force II
[Mega Drive, 1993]


Shining Force CD
[Mega-CD, 1994]

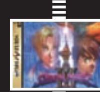

Shining Force Gaiden: Final Conflict
[Game Gear, 1995]


Shining Wisdom
[Saturn, 1995]

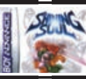
Shining The Holy Ark
[Saturn, 1996]


Shining Force III: Scenario 1
[Saturn, 1997]


Shining Force III: Scenario 2
[Saturn, 1998]


Shining Force III: Scenario 3
[Saturn, 1998]


Shining Force III Premium Disc
[Saturn, 1998]


Shining Soul
[GBA, 2002]


Shining Soul II
[GBA, 2003]

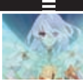

Shining Force: Resurrection Of The Dark Dragon [GBA, 2004]


Shining Tears
[PS2, 2004]


Shining Force Neo
[PS2, 2005]

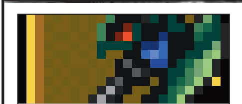

Shining Force EXA
[PS2, 2007]

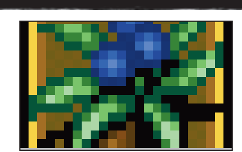

Shining Wind
[PS2, 2007]


Shining Force Feather
[DS, 2009]

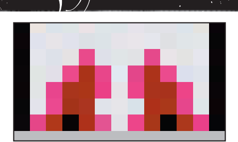
IN THE INVENTORY

Some of the best items you'll find in Shining Force


Dragon Rod
From: *Shining Force III*
+32 Attack, +4 Defence, +40 Fire Resistance **Special:** Summon Hell Dragon


Herb
From: All *Shining* games
Restores 10hp


Shining Sword
From: *Shining Force III*
+59 Attack, +30 Dark/Light Resistance **Special:** Mirage Round attack


Heat Axe
From: *Shining Force*
+22 Attack **Special:** Blaze magic


Angel Wing
From: All *Shining* games
Safely returns all units back to town

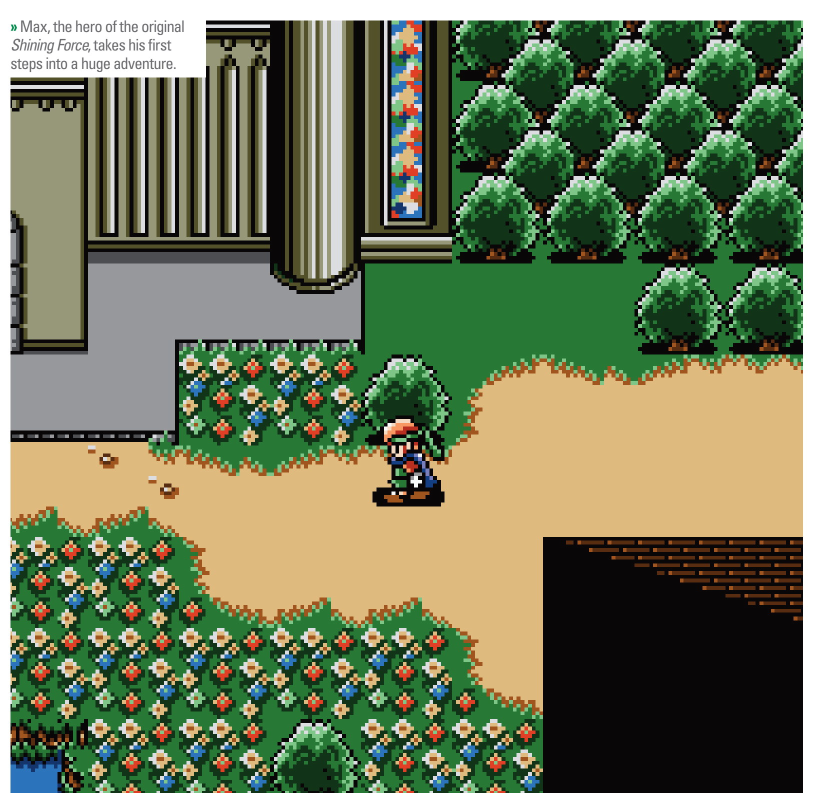
"Shining Force III is the pinnacle of the series but it is also the game that undoubtedly doomed the franchise"

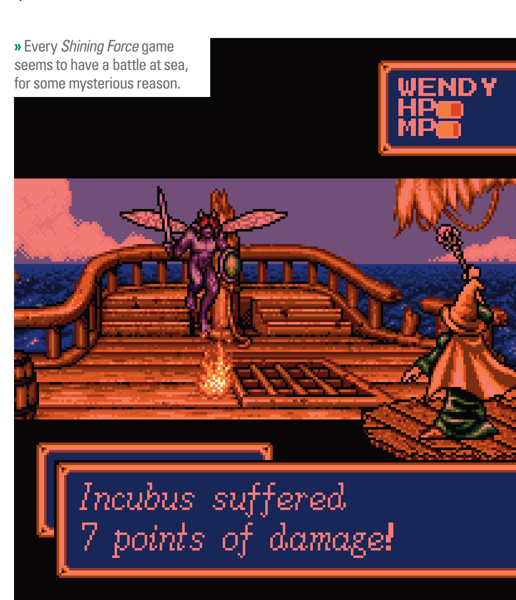
game world is a colourful place, unlike the drab and dreary locations of American RPGs, making it a pleasure to explore. While the strategy battle system rewarded patient tactical play with the satisfying feeling of controlling a huge army in a grand high-stakes battle… and without any boring level grinding either. Also of importance is the fact that *Shining Force* retained the D-pad-arranged, clearly animated menus from *Shining In The Darkness*, to make each and every battle fully accessible to even the most novice RPG player.

The strategy style of *Shining Force* met with such success that Sonic Co stuck to the same style for the next five entries in the *Shining* series. One full sequel on the Mega Drive, three spin-offs for the Game Gear, and a remake of the first two Game Gear titles on Mega-CD all hit between 1992 and 1995. And although each of these games was set in a different time and place they were all linked, not just by a consistent gameplay style but with subtle references to each other game, often showing connections between stories and characters separated from each other by hundreds of years. This was all possible, of course, because the same two people, the Takahashi brothers, were still in charge of the series and maintained creative control of everything from the gameplay to the story. Speaking of the Takahashis, sometime after the release of the first *Shining Force*, the brothers actually left Sega to set up their own company, called Camelot Software Planning, which would be allowed to produce games for other platforms but would continue to collaborate with Sega under the name of Sonic Co.

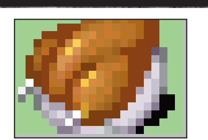
1995 proved to be a huge turning point for the company now known as Camelot. Its first non-Sega game, PlayStation's *Beyond The Beyond*, was released in this year and this was also the time that the *Shining* series deviated from the strategy mould for the first time since *Shining In The Darkness*. Although originally designed with the Mega Drive in mind, 1995's *Shining Wisdom* was hurriedly moved over to the fledgling Saturn, presumably to minimise production costs through the move from cartridge to CD, while bolstering the catalogue of games available on the new system. The result of this was a game that didn't look anywhere near as advanced as other Saturn games like *Virtua Fighter*, but was a great game nonetheless. Designed similarly to Nintendo's *Legend Of Zelda*, *Shining Wisdom* was a puzzly dungeon-exploring RPG with an interesting combat mechanic that involved charging into enemies at high speeds.

Sadly, *Shining Wisdom* was unfavourably received by some fans at the time. Unhappy with the shift from strategy to action and disappointed by the developer's seeming inability to use the Saturn hardware, series followers wrote off *Shining Wisdom* as the low point of the series, for a few years at least.

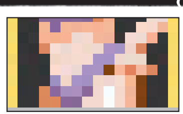

» Max, the hero of the original *Shining Force*, takes his first steps into a huge adventure.



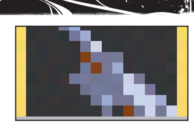
» Every *Shining Force* game seems to have a battle at sea, for some mysterious reason.



Quick Chicken
From: All *Shining* games
Increases agility



Teeny Bikini
From: *Shining Force*
Secret clothing that can only be worn by certain characters



Rifle
From: *Resurrection Of The Dark Dragon*
Only found with a cheat cartridge

Bouncing back just a year later, Camelot released the first in a new generation of *Shining* games that would actually turn out to be the developer's last, but would also prove to be the high point of the series for years to come. Released in December 1996, *Shining The Holy Ark* returned to the series' roots of first-person perspective dungeon crawling with all the power of the Sega Saturn making it much more attractive than the Mega Drive's *Shining In The Darkness*. With a whole new visual style, using pre-rendered characters, a bit like *Donkey Kong Country*, *Shining The Holy Ark* looked like no other RPG of the time and used its excellent visuals to create a sense of immersion previously unseen on consoles. As well as the familiar dank and dirty dungeons of the genre, *Shining The Holy Ark* also had players exploring spooky woods, ice palaces and haunted mansions alongside a team of ninjas, wolfmen and 'Dragonewts' – a variety of settings and personalities that made the world of the game much more fun to explore than virtually any other FPRPG.

The masterstroke at the heart of *Shining The Holy Ark*, however, was the way it prepared players for the epic new trilogy that was to begin in 1997. The story of *Shining The Holy Ark* introduced characters and plot strands that would become much more important in *Shining Force III* – a game that was due to play out over three separately released discs and, for the first time, in 3D.

The most ambitious of all the *Shining* games, *Shining Force III* is the pinnacle of the series but it is also the game that undoubtedly doomed the franchise as well. Planned as three separate disc releases between December 1997 and September 1998, *Shining Force III* offered the player three full-length strategy RPGs, each with its own plot and cast of characters but with an overriding story to link the whole trilogy. The first disc, entitled *Scenario 1: God Warrior Of The Kingdom*, put the player in control of a Republican army that sets out to clear the name of its king, who has been falsely accused of kidnapping the neighbouring Empire's ruler. The second disc, *Scenario 2: Target: Child Of God*, told the same story but from the perspective of the Empire. Playing as the son of the Emperor you follow exactly the same story as on the first disc but with different battles and a whole new perspective on the situation. The final disc, *Scenario 3: Bulzome Rising*, sees both of these Forces join together to fight against the 'Bulzome', a demonic religious cult that has been manipulating both sides all along. Interestingly, the Force in the third scenario is led by a demon hunter named Julian, who was last seen as a very young boy in *Shining The Holy Ark*.

Shining Force III's multi-release structure allowed it to tell a story totally unlike that of any other RPG before it. By offering several different perspectives on the same conflict, each as sympathetic as the other, it created a much more mature, less simplistic depiction of war than most videogames ever attempt. It showed that the distinction between good and evil is not always as clear cut as we might like and, rather oddly for a war game, it postulated that communication and diplomacy can solve problems just as well as a big bloody battle.

The structure had some noteworthy effects on the gameplay, too. Several points within the first adventure offer a series of choices that at first seem like very simple decisions, but actually have an effect on

SHINING HEROES

Or… a beginner's guide to the most generic characters in gaming



MAX

RPGs usually have cliched characters and *Shining Force* is no different. Original hero Max ticks all the boxes. He's an amnesiac, adopted child, skilled with a sword and living within earshot of the royal castle. He's eventually sent on a small mission that turns out to be a mission to stop a demonic beast, called Dark Dragon, from entering the human world.



BOWIE

A much more down-to-earth hero than Max, *Shining Force II*'s Bowie is a simple swordsman who finds himself trying to prevent an ancient evil from awakening. So, erm, the story is just like the first game. Unlike Max, however, Bowie doesn't have a robot for a best friend and actually manages to get with the princess in the end.



MARS

Even though *Shining Wisdom* featured completely different gameplay to *Shining Force*, the characters and story were just more of the same. Mars is the descendant of a legendary knight and must put his sword to good use as defender of Parmecia. A Dark Elf named Pazort is attempting (yes, you guessed it) to revive an ancient evil and it's Mars's job to stop him.



ARTHUR

The hero of *Shining In The Darkness* was completely unnamed, but for its spiritual successor, *Shining The Holy Ark*, Camelot wanted to give the main character a proper identity. And so, Arthur was born. At the start of the adventure, Arthur is sent into a mine to hunt a ninja/thief but actually ends up joining forces with him before heading on to bigger things



SYNBIOS

Synbios is the plucky hero of *Shining Force III Scenario 1* and, like Mars, he is a young swordsman who lives in the shadow of his father's great reputation. At the start of the game he sets out to clear the name of his king, Benetram, who has been accused of kidnapping. But he soon finds himself leading a small ragtag army against the might of the Empire.



MEDION

Medion is one of three sons of the supposedly kidnapped Emperor Domaric, and is the only one of those three who doesn't totally despise the Republic. As the leader of the Force in *Shining Force III: Scenario 2* he first has to confront the Republic but soon comes to sympathise with their plight.



JULIAN

One of the most popular characters in *Shining* history, Julian first appears in *Shining The Holy Ark* as an abandoned child, then appears ten years later in *Shining Force III* as a 'Vandal Hunter', intent on slaying the demons that killed his parents. He is a member of all three forces and leads the one in *Scenario 3* himself.

SHINING DEVELOPERS

The developers behind the Shining series are almost as numerous as the variety of Shining games themselves. Here's a rundown of who exactly made each game in the franchise



CLIMAX ENTERTAINMENT

This small Japanese developer helped the Takahashis get the *Shining* series going by helping them out on *Shining In The Darkness* and *Shining Force*. Its involvement doesn't end there though. Around 1991 Climax began work on an action RPG called *Shining Rogue*, which would have starred Max from the first *Shining Force*, but the Takahashis soon withdrew permission to use the *Shining* brand. That game later became the hugely popular *LandStalker*. One of the sequels to that game, 1999's *Time Stalkers* featured cameos from lots of different Climax games, including Pyra from *Shining In The Darkness* and Jogurt from *Shining Force*. Finally, in 2004, Climax was asked by Sega to remake *Shining Force* on the GBA.



CAMELOT SOFTWARE PLANNING

Originally called Sonic Co and later Sonic Software Planning, Camelot is the true creator of the *Shining* series and worked on every game in the series between 1991 and 1998. A dispute with Sega caused the company to leave the franchise indefinitely but its most recent RPG series, *Golden Sun*, bares many similarities to the *Shining* games.



GRASSHOPPER MANUFACTURE

This crazy studio, most famous for *Killer7* and *No More Heroes*, was asked to develop the *Shining Soul* GBA games in 2002 after Sega took a four-year break from the series. Both games were directed by Akira Ueda, who later made a quirky DS RPG called *Contact*, which plays extremely similarly to his *Shining Soul* games.



AMUSEMENT VISION

One of Sega's most famous internal studios, Amusement Vision is led by the idiosyncratic Toshihiro Nagoshi and was responsible for *Super Monkey Ball* and the recent *Yakuza* series. The studio oversaw many of the most recent *Shining* titles on PS2 and GBA, but only as a producer, while actual development was outsourced externally.



NEX ENTERTAINMENT

This little-known developer used to be owned by Sega and spends most of its time working as an outsource company, developing sequels such as *Time Crisis 3* and *Resident Evil Code: Veronica* in total anonymity. The developer was responsible for the PS2's 2D action RPGs *Shining Tears* and *Shining Wind*.



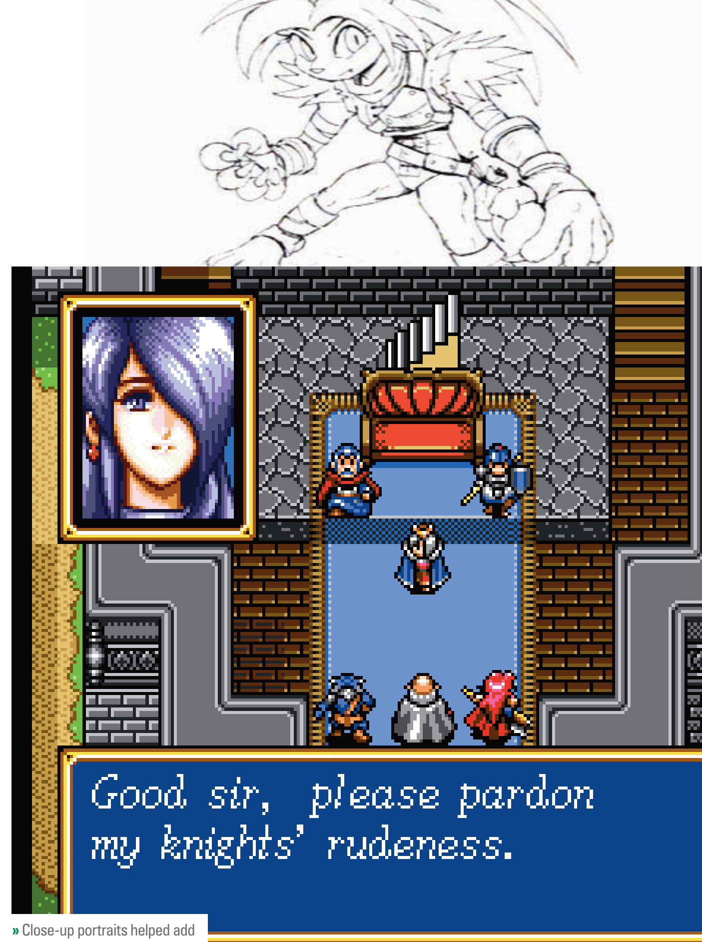
NEVERLAND

Another obscure developer, Neverland is best known for the *Lufia* series as well as the cult Dreamcast RPG *Record Of Lodoss War*. Neverland was hired by Sega to make its 3D action RPGs *Shining Force Neo* and *Shining Force EXA*, both of which share some similarities with *Lodoss War*.



FLIGHT-PLAN

An independent studio with a diverse experience in RPG development. Flight-Plan created the tactical RPG series *Black/Matrix* and will be taking the *Shining Force* series back to its strategy roots with the upcoming *Shining Force Feather* on DS.



» Close-up portraits helped add personalities to key characters during conversation pieces.

> "There's never been a better time to pick up one of the classic entries in the RPG series"

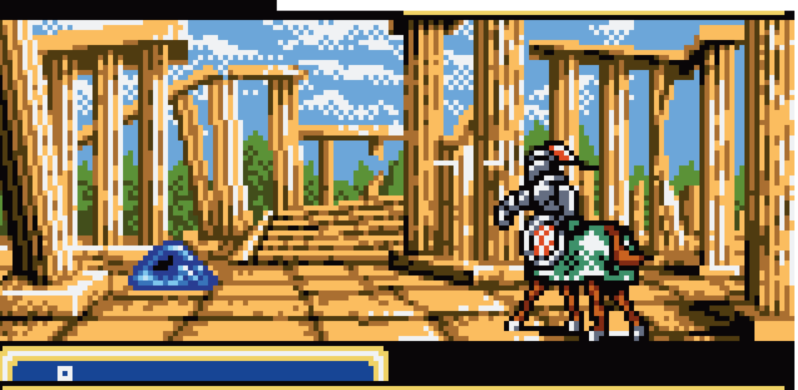
the second and third scenarios, often resulting in secret weapons or characters being made available to the Force. Quite a radical addition to the genre at the time, the method of transferring save files, and so tactical decisions, between games and their sequels has since been used by several other console RPGs such as Capcom's *El Dorado Gate*, Sega's *Shenmue* and even the recent 360 game, *Mass Effect*.

Other gameplay additions to *Shining Force III* include the ability to choose between two different categories of weapons for each character, with their proficiency for each of those weapons levelling up the more they use them, as well as a 'Friendship System' that develops skill-strengthening relationships between those characters that stick close together on the battlefield and help each other out. And, of course, there were the Saturn's blindingly advanced 3D visuals. As well as allowing Camelot to create much more complicated, multi-level battle maps for the Force to fight on, the Saturn's extra power also made the attack animations, which had always been a selling point of the series, much more beautiful than ever before.

Undoubtedly the greatest of all the *Shining* games, and maybe even Sega's best RPG, too, *Shining Force III* was a masterpiece of invention, combining stunning visuals with a thoughtful story, advanced gameplay and an unusual structure. Unfortunately, however, most *Shining* fans were not able to witness the true crowning glory of this ambitious game as only the first disc of the trilogy was ever released outside of Japan. The reason for this is that Sega of America and Sega Europe







» Not all of the *Shining Force* games were translated into English, unfortunately.

were taking such a beating from the dominant PlayStation brand that they were losing money at a worrying rate and could only afford to translate and release the first scenario.

The first disc was released in the West in 1998 and was simply titled *Shining Force III*, with no indication that it was just the first third of a whole trilogy. This unfortunate decision must have resulted in a very confusing RPG for those who were unaware of the other two Japan-only scenarios, especially as the game ends on a cliffhanger that would apparently never be resolved. Thankfully, however, a group of enterprising fans soon got to work on translating the script of the other two scenarios so that eager importers could enjoy the full trilogy as it was intended. Each script can still be located on the net, at www.shiningforcecentral.com, where a new team is currently trying to create a patch to incorporate the translation into working copies of the game software itself.

Having poured years of hard work and inspiration into *Shining Force III*, it's understandable that Camelot, and the Takahashis in particular, weren't too happy that the complete trilogy was never fully released in the West and, as it turned out, this problem was only the tip of the iceberg. Anyone lucky enough to own the *Shining Force III Premium Disc*, a collection of new battles and bonus materials given away to fans, may be aware of a secret text document on the disc. This file is a production diary written by Camelot's programmer Yasuhiro Taguchi, who accuses Sega of not giving Camelot enough support while the publisher moved its resources over from the Saturn to the Dreamcast. Specifically, Taguchi claims that Sega did not promote the RPG as much as it should have and actually refused to help Camelot resolve some technical problems during the development of *Scenario 3*.

It's unknown if these were the only problems that Camelot had with Sega, but common sense tells us that there must have been many issues the now-independent developer had with its publisher, because this was the last time they ever worked together. Camelot walked away from Sega and the series it had created, later forming a close relationship with Nintendo with whom it would collaborate on the Mario sports games as well as the excellent *Golden Sun* series of RPGs. Sega, meanwhile, forged on with the *Shining* series by hiring different developers to create new entries but, ten years and seven new games later, none have come close to the excellence that Camelot achieved with any of its own games.

It's easy to feel a little depressed about this but with the classics now easier to find than ever – all three Mega Drive games are available on Virtual Console, while the Saturn games are becoming less valuable every day – there has never been a better time to pick up one of the classic entries in the RPG series and see what all the fuss is about. If you have any respect for authorial control, or just like highly polished and playable tactical RPGs, then we suggest you give one of them a go as soon as possible. You won't regret it.

SPECIAL THANKS TO WOLFGANG LANDGRAF FOR SUPPLYING ALL SPRITES

SHINE ON...

Although Camelot walked away from the *Shining* series in 1998, Sega thankfully kept the series going without the original developer. Sadly, most of the games it's released in the last decade have been quite poor.

The two *Shining Soul* games on Game Boy Advance were average action RPGs with the distinct privilege of being the first-ever multiplayer *Shining* games. The second was quite good, but the first was despised by fans for monkeying around with the storyline of previous games.

Shining Tears and *Shining Wind* were similar to the *Soul* games except they were made for PS2 and featured artwork by a well-known hentai artist. Most of the merchandise featured Lolita-esque fox-girls with unrealistic bodies and tiny clothing. Such presentation ruined an otherwise decent pair of games.

Shining Force Neo and *Shining Force EXA*, meanwhile, ignored the naming conventions of the series by not being strategy RPGs. Instead they were 3D action RPGs that played a lot like the *Soul*, *Tears* and *Wind* games.

Shining Force: Resurrection Of The Dark Dragon, meanwhile, is the only decent post-Camelot game so far, mostly because it was a fairly faithful remake of the very first *Shining Force* title.

As for the future, the series makes its DS debut next year with *Shining Force Feather* – a game that looks to truly return to the strategy roots for the first time in years – while the name *Shining Force Gear* has recently been trademarked and is believed to be a strategy RPG for Wii.

CITADEL

BEWARE THE MONKS OF THE CITADEL...



- **PUBLISHER:** SUPERIOR SOFTWARE
- **RELEASED:** 1985
- **GENRE:** ADVENTURE
- **FEATURED HARDWARE:** BBC MICRO
- **EXPECT TO PAY:** £5+



HISTORY

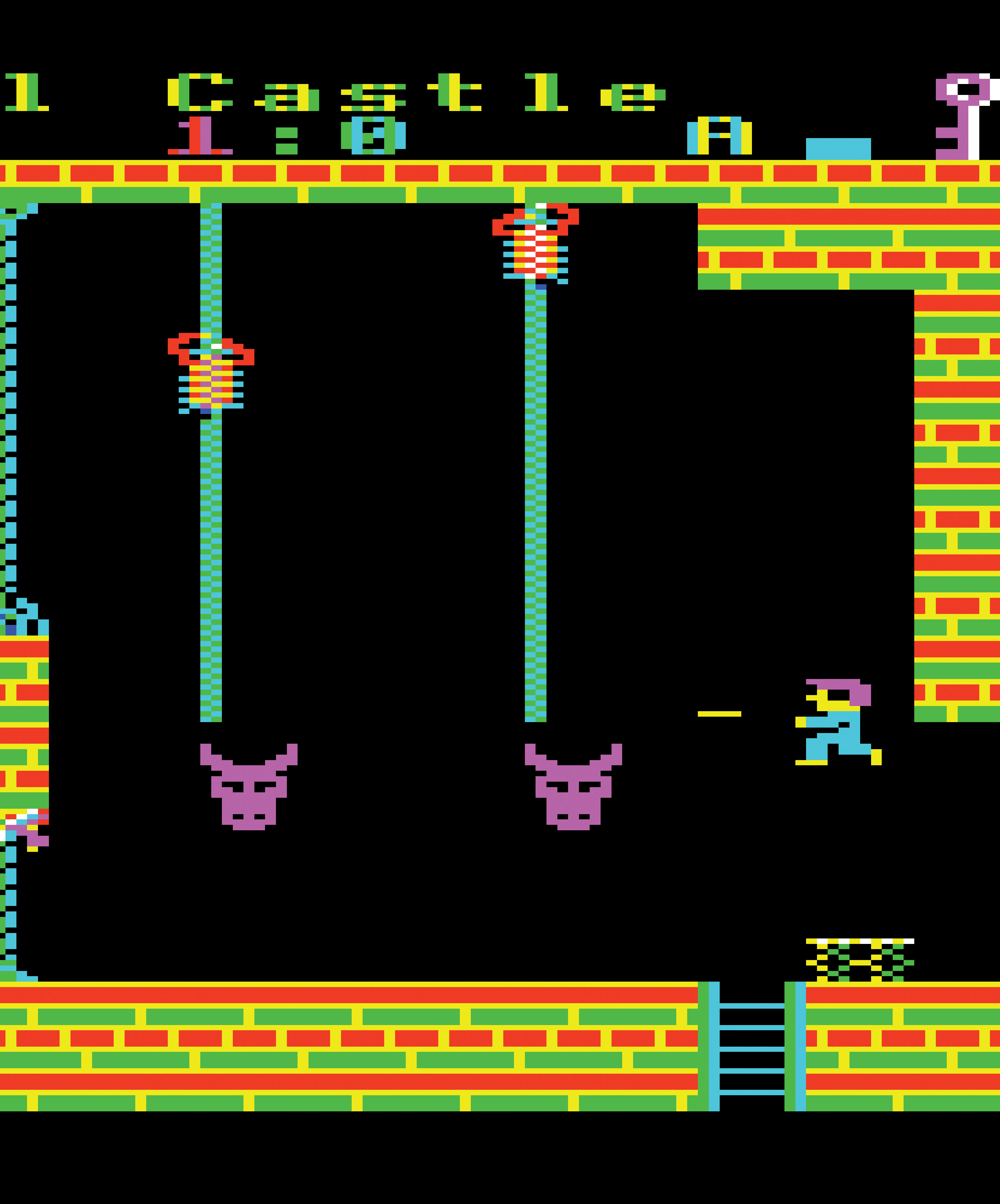
Sometimes it can take a while to appreciate a great game. Of course, the merits of certain titles are immediately apparent from the moment you play them. Some, on the other hand, require you to put a fair bit of effort in before you can start reaping their rewards. Then, of course, there are games like Superior Software's *Citadel* which simply manage to do both.

From the moment Metal Mickey says the word 'Citadel' several times over you know you're in for a treat and Superior Software doesn't disappoint. A brilliant fusion of both the adventure and platform genres, you're required to explore the titular Citadel in search of five hidden crystals – and three crowns if you were intent on winning the prize Superior Software was offering – while avoiding the bastion's dangerous monks.

As well as cleverly combining two distinct genres, *Citadel* also had several other neat touches that helped set it apart from similar games, with the most notable being the option of playing as either a man or a woman (both of which looked distinctly different to each other). Then there was the fact that touching an enemy wouldn't instantly kill you, but would instead rob you of energy. Monks would drain this quicker than other creatures (instantly sending you back to wherever you had entered the room), but unlike the other enemies they could at least be despatched with a well-timed hit to the face.

If *Citadel*'s many monks proved to be a pain to defeat then its fiendishly constructed puzzles were even more tortuous and would often have you scratching your head in sheer bewilderment. While many were relatively straightforward (drop a chicken under a fireplace to cook it), they became increasingly difficult, especially once you had to start combining the two available items you could pick up on your travels.

Citadel was an instant classic on its release and the last 20 years have done nothing to diminish that fact. Hunt it down if you're looking for a platform challenge that requires brains as well as reflexes.


Castle
1:0
A



THE MAKING OF...

Panzer Dragoon Saga



IN THE SECOND OF OUR TWO-PART LOOK BEHIND THE SCENES OF THE PANZER DRAGOON SERIES' DEVELOPMENT, JONTI DAVIES DISCUSSES THE PRODUCTION OF THE MOST ENIGMATIC RPG OF ITS GENERATION WITH EX-TEAM ANDROMEDA CHIEF **YUKIO FUTATSUGI**

The mid-to-late-Nineties was a coming-of-age period for Japanese console adventures and RPGs, as the nation's most talented developers competed to produce the most epic, boundary-breaking games that would unlock the full potential of 32 and 64-bit hardware. Between 1997 and 1998, *Final Fantasy VII, Panzer Dragoon Saga* and *Zelda: Ocarina Of Time* let PlayStation, Saturn and N64 owners (respectively) in on a secret: games could be produced like Hollywood movies and could thrive for being such ambitious, massive-scale productions.

Even among that elite group, however, Team Andromeda's *Panzer Dragoon Saga* stood apart as being at odds with its contemporaries. Its unique qualities included a sparsely populated game world, a non-traditional battle system, an original spoken language, and a refined blend of real-time 3D and FMV cut-scenes. (By contrast, *FFVII*'s battles were largely by the book and it relied on pre-rendered 3D environments, while *Ocarina Of Time* maintained the *Zelda* series' friendly villager appeal.) An obvious reason for *Saga*'s diversity was its conception as an outgrowth of *Panzer Dragoon* and *Zwei*, the two 3D shooters we looked at last month – but there's more to it than that, according to Yukio Futatsugi, who was team leader on Andromeda's *Azel RPG* project.

"After we'd created the first *Panzer Dragoon* game, we began to prepare *Zwei* and *Saga* side by side," Yukio recalls. "Ishii, who's now at AQ Interactive, was our boss at the time, and he instructed us to create a second game in the series that would extend the shooting action of *Panzer Dragoon*, as well as a third game that would expand the series' game world. Once that plan had been established, we started work on *Zwei* and *Saga* simultaneously. By the end of the first year of development, we'd decided on most of the make-up of *Saga*'s feature set. During those first 12 months, we settled on all of the important things that would make *Saga* what it was: the story; the dragon transformation, which we called 'Dragon Morphing', and which replaced the [traditional] party play of Japanese RPGs; the battle system, in which you could claim territory through victories, and so on."

As it approved the development of *Panzer Dragoon Saga* in April 1995, Sega could be forgiven for not being able to foresee then that the Saturn would struggle to survive the PlayStation or N64. Ultimately, the Dreamcast was a retail reality in Japan by the end of 1998 and *Panzer Dragoon Saga* became one of the Saturn's final hurrahs earlier in the same year. Still, Sega's ebullience (or folly, depending on how you look at it) in 1995 led to the bankrolling of the biggest console game project in the company's history up to that point. "In the end, we had a team of more than 50 people working on *Saga*," Yukio reveals. "I think that was an incredibly large-scale production for the time. It took so many staff and so much time to produce *Saga* – in total, development lasted about two years and nine months – that it used up what was for the time an extremely large budget. In that sense, you could say that *Saga* paved the way for the big-budget games of today."

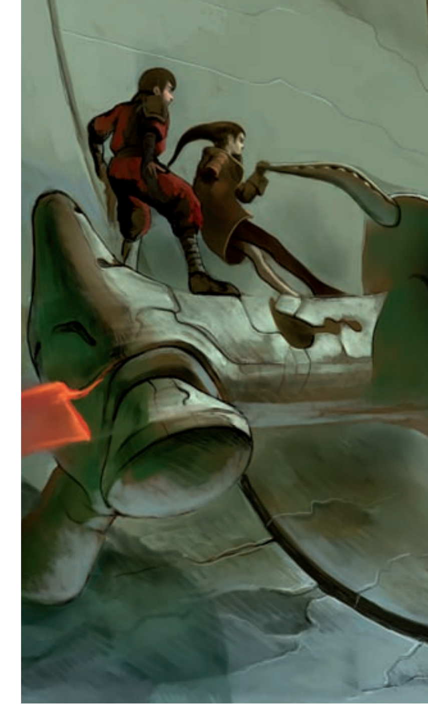
To be kind to Sega, it appears that no one really had any idea that *Saga*'s development would become such an overblown, expensive process. Initially Team Andromeda had been split between those who were working on *Zwei* and those who were producing *Saga*

IN THE KNOW

» PUBLISHER: SEGA
» DEVELOPER: TEAM ANDROMEDA
» RELEASED: 1998
» GENRE: RPG
» EXPECT TO PAY: £70

THE MAKING OF...

PANZER DRAGOON SAGA



"I thought Saga was going to be a big game, but I certainly didn't envisage it stretching to fill four discs!"

EVEN YUKIO FUTATSUGI WAS SURPRISED BY THE SCALE OF THIS SAGA

– eventually, almost everyone was focused on the RPG line: "For the first year or so we were working with a smaller number of people," Yukio recalls. "Then, once the *Zwei* team had finished their project, we brought many of them over to work on *Saga*. The newcomers included people with previous RPG experience, which was helpful, and together we grew into this bigger team of 50-plus."

(According to Kentaro Yoshida, who was stationed on the *Zwei* side of Andromeda before being repositioned as a cut-scene director on the *Saga* project – and whom we met last issue – the team was effectively split in two during this period. However, there was mutual interest in what both halves of Team Andromeda were up to.)

As well as sapping human and financial resources from within Sega, *Panzer Dragoon Saga*'s story and structure continued to expand after the initial plans had been drawn, leaving the developers responsible with a conundrum over how they were going to fit the game data on to a CD-ROM. Or two. Or three. Or… "I thought *Saga* was going to be a big game, but I certainly didn't envisage it stretching to fill four discs," Yukio exclaims. But it did – and then some, forcing Team Andromeda to scale back its most ambitious plans in order to limit the game to 'just' four discs: "I remember how, to some extent, we had to compile all of the game's content, calculate its capacity and then modify certain scenarios in ways that completely changed some of the game's most impressive scenes."

Even the storyboarding work was prone to stop-start intervention. "Basically," says Yukio, "I wrote the first draft of *Panzer Dragoon Saga*'s story and then argued about various points with the main members of the team. Then I rewrote the story, taking into consideration the discussions we'd had, and the final draft took shape." Inevitably, though, the chop-and-change process wasn't entirely detrimental to the final product: "One of our designers, Yokota, who's now at [Tetsuya Mizuguchi-headed *Lumines* developer] Q Entertainment, was convinced of an idea for a visual theme where dragons would have open holes in their abdomens. Compared with that, I think the look of the final game was cute in the extreme," Yukio laughs.

Regardless of any wished-for physiological abnormalities, deliberately curtailing the *Saga* experience, while managing to tell the game's story to completion was just one of many challenges that faced Team Andromeda. It's fair to say that most of the team's difficulties were borne out of a charming combination of inexperience and boundless ambition. "Making *Saga* was a really difficult job," Yukio says, "because for many of us this was our first RPG project. To make matters worse, our aim was to make a completely 3D RPG – which was quite unusual at the time."

Freedom of movement in *Panzer Dragoon Saga* was a crucial factor in its odd sense of realism – whether on dragonback, flying through canyons and across open plains, or walking around towns, bases and camps, the player would always feel like an integral part of a living (but sleepy) universe and be free to explore at will. Pre-rendered environments wouldn't have sufficed to convey this sensation: Yukio remains convinced that real-time 3D graphics were the way to go, in spite of the Saturn hardware's limitations. "One of my favourite areas of *Saga* was the game's towns and how they were fully drawn in real-time 3D," he says. "Those locations were original and I think the way they were constructed was, at the time, quite novel. It certainly wasn't easy to make such a good-looking game using the Saturn hardware. The fact that it looks beautiful even today is really down to the strong sense [of style] and the vision of the designers who worked on *Saga*. In particular, I remember Sakai, who now works on the *Phantasy Star Online* series, as being a magnificent designer…"

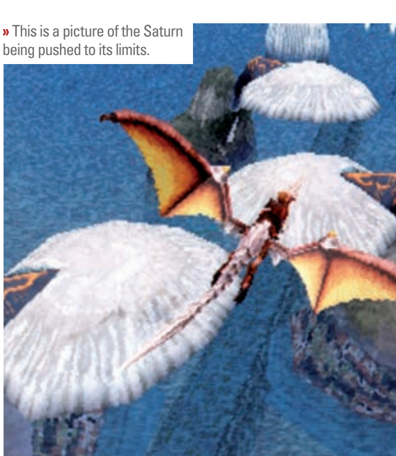
On top of the graphical depiction of *Saga*'s universe – which (when appropriate) spliced what were arguably the best Saturn FMV cut-scenes with Team Andromeda's dourly portrayed real-time 3D environments and mysterious characters – Yukio took it upon himself to create an original language that would remain constant throughout the *Panzer Dragoon* games. "I based the *Panzer Dragoon* language on Latin wording," he says, "but I deliberately made the enunciation of words sound very clear and distinct. It really wasn't that difficult – actually, I found it thoroughly enjoyable to construct a fictional language… Probably because I'm a bit of a maniac!"



The effect of *Saga*'s otherworldly language was a great international leveller, really: even players from Japan had to rely on subtitles to get the gist of voiced characters' dialogues. It also added yet another layer of impenetrability to *Saga*'s detached, bleak ambience. In turn, players who persisted with the adventure would feel as though they were being granted privileged access to a peculiar world hidden away from our own (and the game's ultimate lack of commercial success, along with the scarcity of copies available worldwide, accidentally accentuated that sensation further still).

We ask Yukio how he felt at the culmination of Team Andromeda's work: "Our template for *Panzer Dragoon Saga* was unprecedented, really: to take the model of a shooting game and turn it into an RPG, and at the same time push it some way beyond the [original *Panzer Dragoon*] experience. We were working blind the whole time. I can look back on that period with happy memories now, but at the time it was terrible! [Laughs] I remember thinking, 'Even if we can make this, I can't see how or where it will end.' But on the day the post-production work was completed, I remember having dinner at a restaurant in the basement of a train station [near Sega HQ] with Kusunoki, and we were saying 'At last, it's done!' and 'The end is in sight!' I'll never forget the taste of the pint of beer I drank in there…"

» This is a picture of the Saturn being pushed to its limits.



Besides winding up somewhere in the heavenly place where underplayed forgotten (and expensive) masterpieces idle in the sky, *Panzer Dragoon Saga* also had an earthly afterlife via its influences on subsequent follies. For one, Yukio notes: "Some of the *Saga* staff assigned to work on the game's camera system went on to develop *Shenmue*, which explains why *Shenmue*'s camera system is similar to *Saga*'s… *Panzer Dragoon Saga* was released deep into the closing stages of the Saturn's life, so it didn't sell very well, and because of that it wasn't regarded very highly within Sega. And as a result of that, the *Panzer* team broke up. There was absolutely no suggestion or encouragement of a Dreamcast sequel. Many of Team Andromeda's members were dispersed here and there among Sega's other departments – but later they went on to make other good Dreamcast and Xbox games, so I think everything worked out quite well really."

In that sense, everything did work out well. In other ways, though, *Saga*'s development was fraught with incident and difficulty, including the (apparently stress-related) suicide of a Team Andromeda member midway through the project. In spite of that tragedy, and even though *Saga*'s production and release coincided with one of Sega's most humiliating periods as a console format holder, Yukio Futatsugi and team managed to create a game of such haunting resonance that it remains topical and prized (among those who are lucky enough to own a copy) more than a decade on. Timeless.





» Today, *Panzer Dragoon Saga* in its UK/US form is expensive but essential.

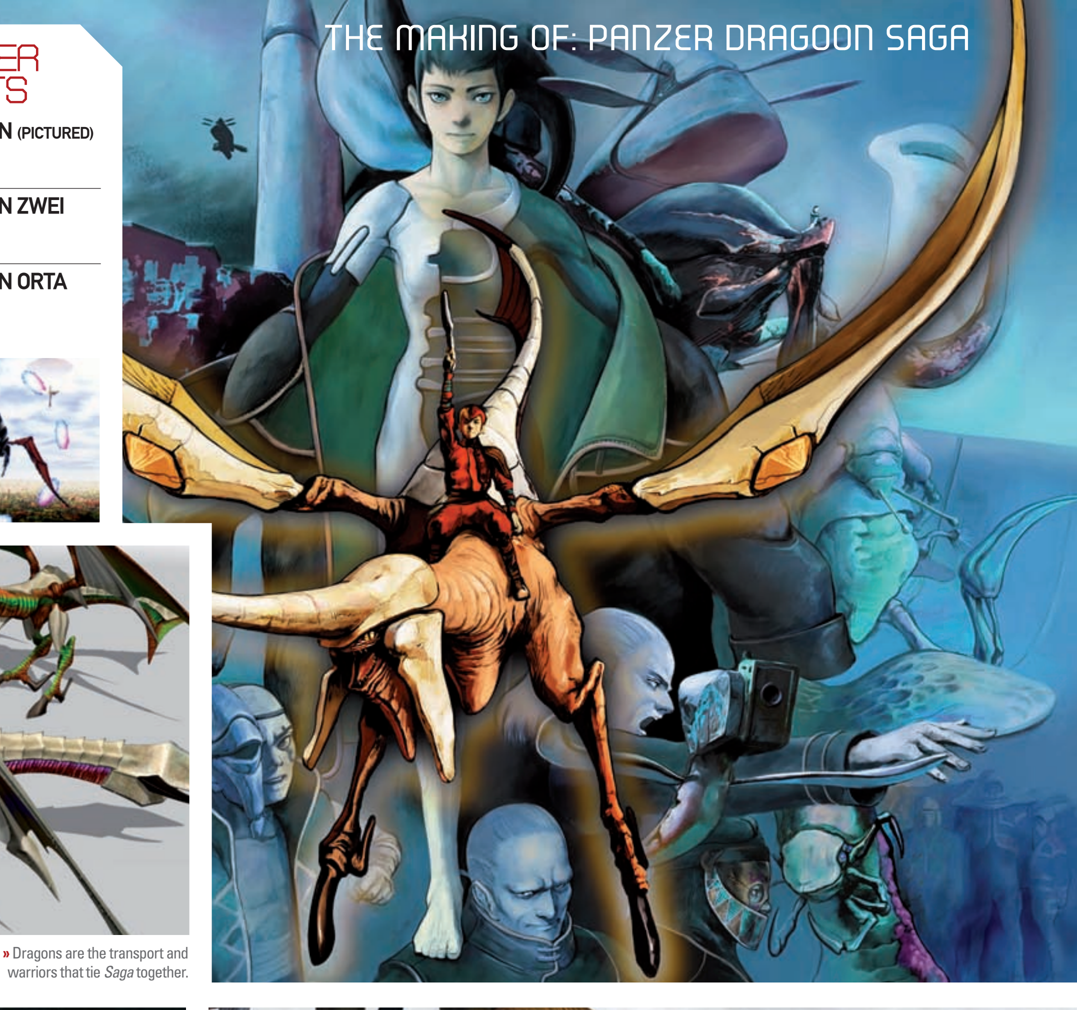
DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

PANZER DRAGOON (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: SATURN
YEAR: 1995

PANZER DRAGOON ZWEI
SYSTEM: SATURN
YEAR: 1997

PANZER DRAGOON ORTA
SYSTEM: XBOX
YEAR: 2002





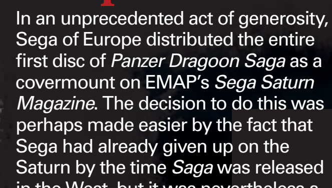
» Dragons are the transport and warriors that tie *Saga* together.







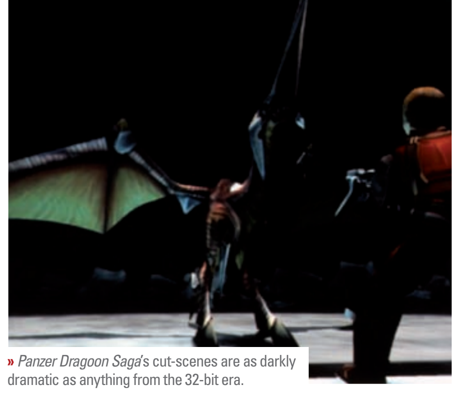




Saga freebies, cheapo versions

In an unprecedented act of generosity, Sega of Europe distributed the entire first disc of *Panzer Dragoon Saga* as a covermount on EMAP's *Sega Saturn Magazine*. The decision to do this was perhaps made easier by the fact that Sega had already given up on the Saturn by the time *Saga* was released in the West, but it was nevertheless a gesture appreciated by the format's loyal, suffering supporters.

Today, English-language versions of the full game (both PAL and US NTSC) tend to fetch at least £70 because of the scarcity of these releases: likely only around 40,000 copies of *Saga* were made available in the West during 1998, and the Saturn was gone (but not forgotten) by 1999. The Japanese version of *Saga*, however, is nowhere near as rare and can easily be found in Japan's game shops today for just 1,500yen (£8.50). Look for it under its original title of *Azel: Panzer Dragoon RPG* and prepare to miss out on the game's subtitled story (unless you're good with Japanese script, of course).



» *Panzer Dragoon Saga*'s cut-scenes are as darkly dramatic as anything from the 32-bit era.

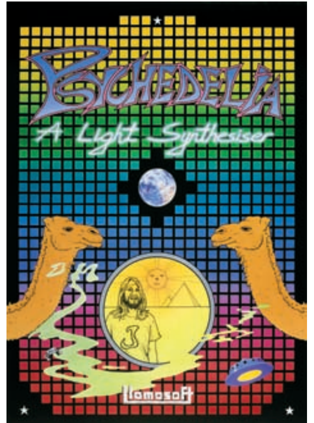
» Team Andromeda preferred town environments generated in real-time to any *FFVII*-style pre-rendered mischief, and it's not hard to see why.







In the first of an occasional series, we look at the artists behind the images that adorned the boxes and cassette covers of some classic retro games. Our opening exhibitor is Steinar Lund, whose cover art has graced releases by Quicksilva, Domark, MicroProse and, most famously, Llamasoft. Paul Drury asks him about airbrushes, artistic licence and sheep sketching

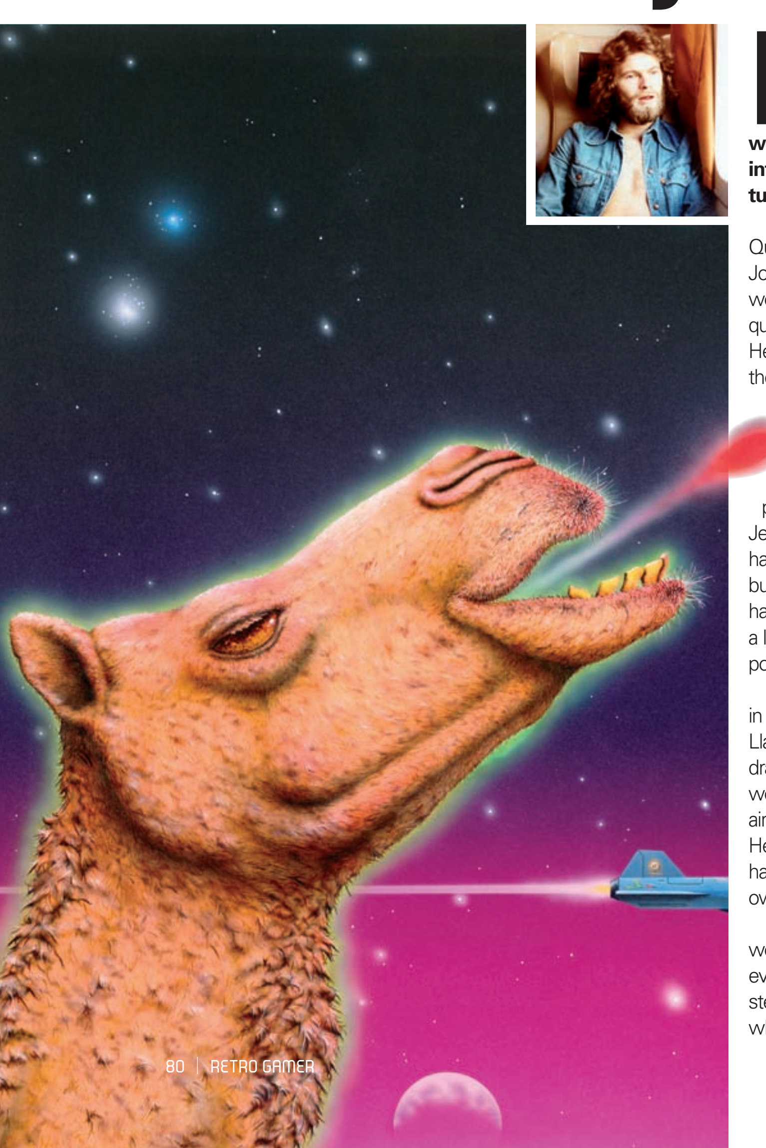


▶ **Psychedelia**
November 1984
"The image of Jeff was done from a photo. I took quite few of him including some by the prehistoric stones at Avebury. Am I suggesting the use of herbal tobacco might improve players' enjoyment of *Psychedelia*? No way man, I just could not draw straight lines that day."



▲ **Sheep in Space**
April 1984
"This was the first work I did for Jeff and it went on from there. The sheep was based on various photographs and references. I seem to remember having some sheep photos from a visit to Wales. Many years later, I gave the original artwork to Jeff as a present, as he was very fond of it."

The Gallery Steinar Lund



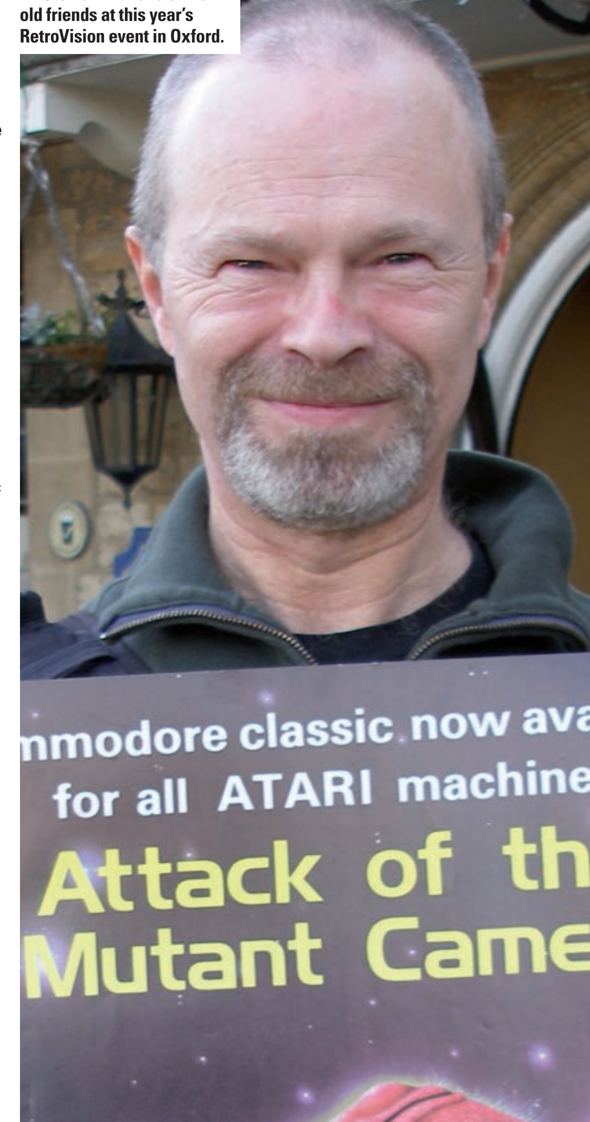
Born on the west coast of Norway, Steinar Lund moved to England as a child in 1964, settling in Southampton where his father worked on the ferries. After studying interior design at Kingston College of Art, he turned his hand to painting.

He got his break in game art through Quicksilva, being an acquaintance of co-founders John Hollis and Nick Lambert, and his opening work for them, *QS Defenda* on the ZX81, may qualify as the first ever colour cassette cover. He produced many more memorable covers for the company, ranging from the Tolkien-esque fantasy of *Dragonsbane* to the *Star Wars* sci-fi of *Xadom*, but it was a visit to a computer show in 1984 that would lead to his most productive and lasting professional relationship. "That's where I met Jeff Minter… and his mum," recalls Steinar. "Jeff had a hippy look to him. I'd just missed that era, but loved the music, especially Pink Floyd. We had something in common there. I hadn't done a lot of covers by then, but I showed Jeff my portfolio and he liked it."

Steinar would often visit Jeff at his home in Basingstoke to have a look at the latest Llamasoft project, then exchange preliminary drawings by fax for approval before beginning work on the final image, generally using an airbrush with some finishing touches by hand. He continued to collaborate with Jeff until the hairy one began working for Atari, who had its own in-house artists.

Although no longer involved in videogame work, his distinctive art style has featured on everything from books to CD covers. Visit www.steinarlund.com or the next RetroVision event, where you can even buy him a beer…

▼ **Steinar with one of his old friends at this year's RetroVision event in Oxford.**





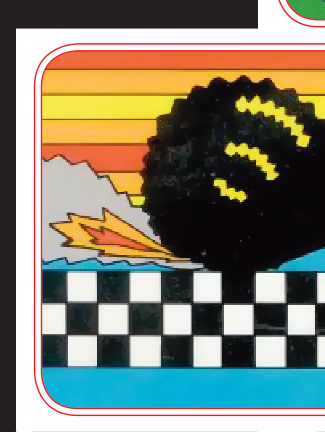
▲ **Beasties** October 1984 **"This was Jeff's idea. The artwork was for a software index magazine so I think he wanted to include all the beasties from his games. I suppose Rory had a guest appearance. A shame to leave him out."**

▲ **F-15 Strike Eagle II** August 1989 **"I'd often do sketches, first to see if I think a composition works and then to let the client choose by sending them over by fax – no email in those days! Did I feel uncomfortable creating images of war? Well, do game designers and players feel uncomfortable creating and playing war games? War reporters record terrible scenes, but it doesn't mean they support violence. The main aim was to depict a machine of power and the F-15 is certainly one of those."**

◀ **Viva-Vic** March 1986 **"Viva suggested to me some type of Mexican outlaw or freedom fighter – Viva Zapata! – hence the sun, cigar and weapon, all with a sci-fi twist, of course. Do I think the leather and studs make it look a little camp? Well, I didn't have camp in mind. It was a fun character to create and I just let the imagination go. Mind you, I used to enjoy the camp TV *Batman* series, so…"**

ACTIVISIONARIES

EARLIER THIS YEAR ACTIVISION MERGED WITH VIVENDI AND INSTANTLY BECAME THE BIGGEST, MOST POWERFUL THIRD-PARTY VIDEOGAME PUBLISHER IN THE WORLD FOR THE SECOND TIME IN ITS EXISTENCE. THE FIRST TIME AROUND IT WAS THE BIGGEST BY DEFAULT, AS ITS FOUNDING FATHERS EXPLAIN…



In the late-Seventies Atari was at a crossroads, trying to become a big business and maintain a small-company atmosphere," reveals designer David Crane. "Middle management, who worked day-to-day with the people responsible for the success of the products, recognised the value of the employees. Upper management, however, treated games as widgets and the creative staff as replaceable drones. One group made promises; the other group broke them. Morale had hit rock bottom.

"At the same time, a memo was circulated from marketing showing the sales figures for videogame cartridges for the previous year, by per cent of sales. Their intention was to show what people were buying so that we in the design group would 'make more games like these'. Dissecting this memo at lunch with three friends it became clear that we four designers were responsible for 60 per cent of Atari's $100 million game cartridge sales for the year. Yes, four guys, making $30K per year, designed products that made the company over $60 million.

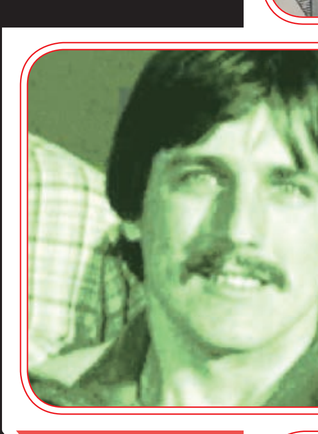
"We went to management, not looking for much, but hoping for recognition and a little extra money," continues David. "When we got in to see the president, we were told that we were 'no more important to the company than the guy on the assembly line who puts them in the box'."

Those four guys were David, Alan Miller, Larry Kaplan and Bob Whitehead. Names that should be familiar to any retro game fan now, but were unheard of in 1979 despite having worked on several popular Atari games such as *Air-Sea Battle* and *Canyon Bomber*. "I wanted to be recognised for my work, to receive credit for it," remembers Alan some 30 years after the event. "Atari had been acquired by Warner Bros. in late-1976, a few months before I joined the company. We thought that surely, as a part of one of the world's largest record and book publishers and television and movie producers, they'd understand the need to recognise artists for their contribution, and compensate them accordingly. It turned out we were very wrong about that."

In June 1979, the four game designers met in secrecy with Jim Levy, a record-industry executive who, as it turned out, had already formulated a business plan for financing an independent software company. "After a series of meetings over a few weeks, I agreed to revise my business plan to position the company as a producer of Atari-compatible videogames that would eventually expand into other forms of game and personal computer software, and the boys agreed to become the core design team for the company," remembers Jim.

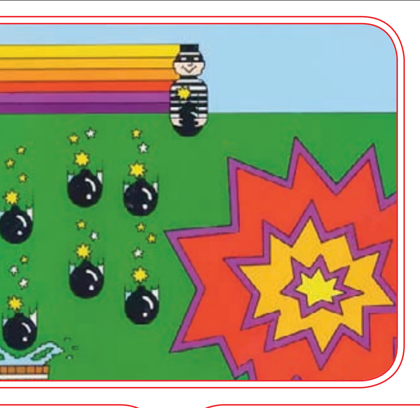
"ATARI WAS TRYING TO BECOME A BIG BUSINESS AND MAINTAIN A SMALL-COMPANY ATMOSPHERE"

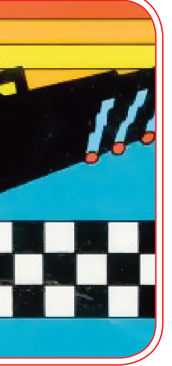
"I rewrote the plan during the month of July, introduced the design team to my financial backers in early-August, and secured an agreement for financing in late-August. The fundamental agreement between the boys and me was that they would create the games and I would build the company. And that's pretty much what we did."

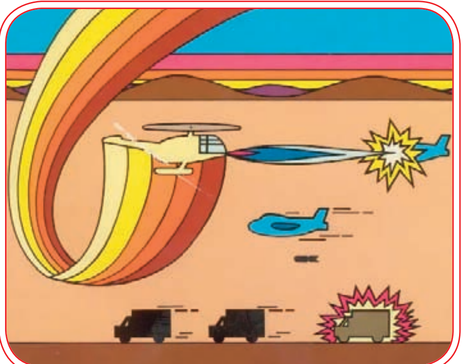
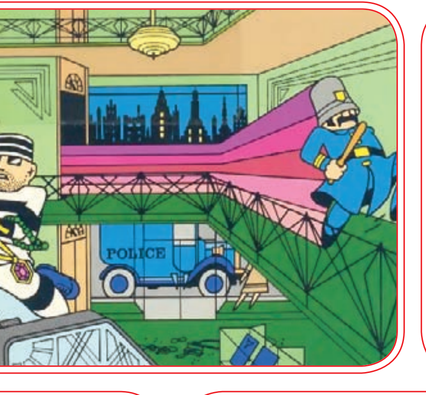


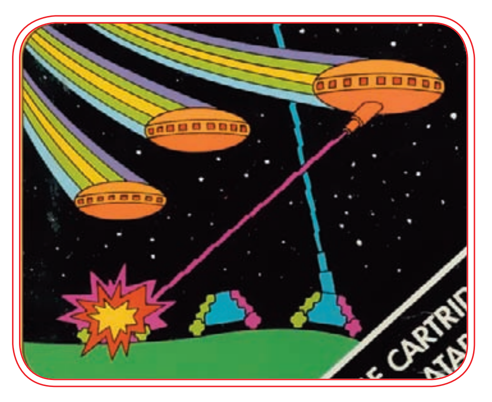
The company was incorporated on 1 October 1979 and was branded as Activision: a name coined by Jim himself, slyly and rather famously constructed so that it would appear before Atari in any alphabetical listings. The designers got the credit they were looking for and set about creating what would become some of the most famous videogames of all time. But this breakthrough did not come without a cost, as the designers reveal.

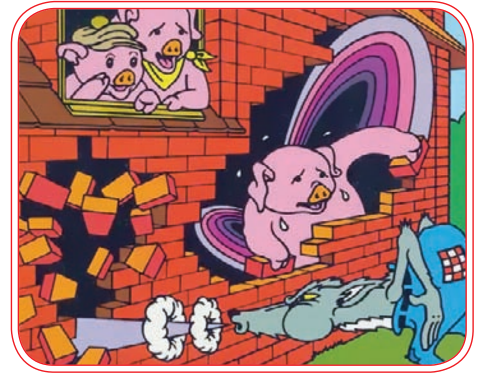
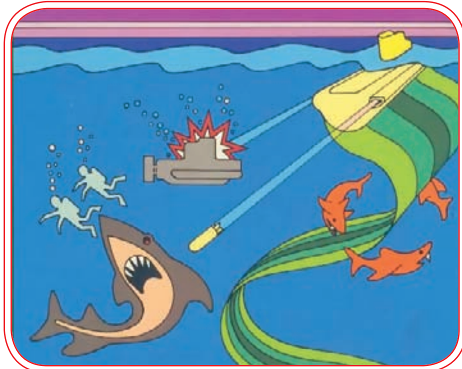
Jim had been introduced to the creative team through a lawyer working for Alan, who apparently believes such legal assistance to be both a blessing and a curse. "Ever since then I've had much more involvement with attorneys than I ever wanted," he says. "But that's just a necessary part of the equation of doing business in the US. Generally speaking, it

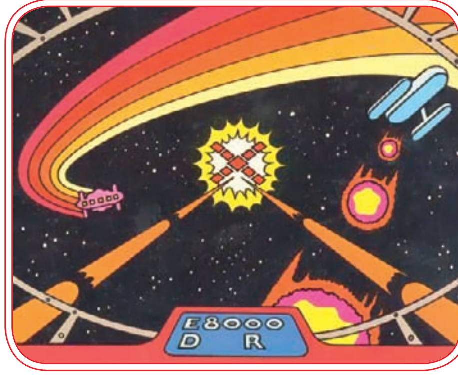


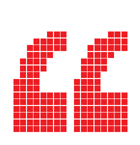






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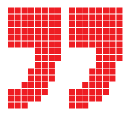
Where Are They Now?

ALAN MILLER



I was approached in 2007 by Steve Cartwright, one of the early Activision designers, about starting an online virtual world for young children. Steve had a great concept for the site, far beyond the vision of the leader in the category, Club Penguin, but very straightforward to implement. It also incorporated educational aspects, with which I had a lot of experience. We started development, but I knew we were going to encounter problems when, later in 2007, Disney bought Club Penguin for a reported $700 million. The category was flooded with similar ventures and we were simply too late to get the funding we needed to go from prototype to market launch. I ended that effort in early-2008 and am now looking for my next venture.

I'm also a member of the Free 2 Play Forum. I believe that games that are free to gamers will play a huge role in the future of the industry. Designers and publishers need to sort out the details of how free-to-play games will be adequately monetised; by advertising, by the purchase of virtual goods, or through some other mechanism.



GAMES WITH VISION

The best games from Activision's classic period



PITFALL II: LOST CAVERNS

Year: 1984 Designer: David Crane

David Crane believes sequels are a great way of testing new ideas without risk, and *Pitfall II* attests to that. More ambitious than the first game, the multiple levels and jaw-dropping water effects made the 2600 sing in ways we never thought possible.



GHOSTBUSTERS

Year: 1984 Designer: David Crane

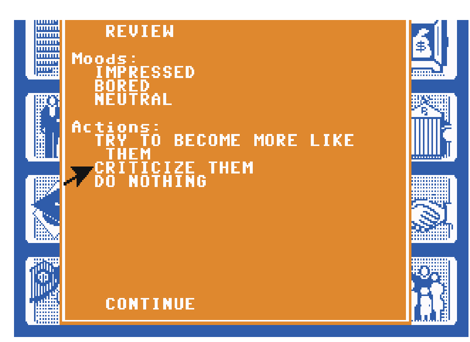
Although it began life as another game completely, *Ghostbusters* suited the licence and remains one of the best game-to-movie adaptations. Ecto-1, the Marshmallow Man, even the lyrics to the theme tune. It was all here and was great fun to play.



KABOOM!

Year: 1981 Designer: Larry Kaplan

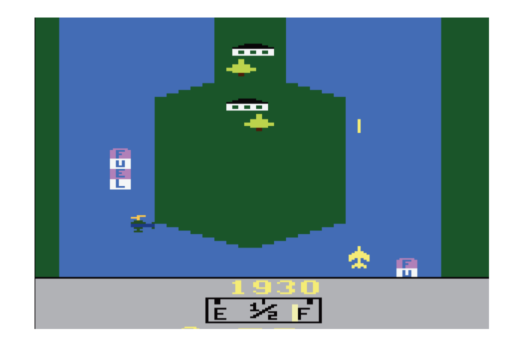
This unofficial remake of Atari's 1978 arcade game *Avalanche* recalls many of the Game & Watch titles for its simple premise and addictive gameplay. As enjoyable as the comparison suggests, *Kaboom!* is one of the best one-more-go games on Atari 2600.



ALTER EGO

Year: 1986 Designer: Peter J Favaro

The *Alter Ego* game puts you in control of a human being and tasks you with controlling a condensed version of their life from birth to death. Designed by a professional psychologist, it shows how the decisions we make in our youth can affect us up until old age.



RIVER RAID

Year: 1982 Designer: Carol Shaw

Way before its time, *River Raid* tinkered with the formula of vertical shoot-'em-ups decades before the likes of *Psyvariar* or *Ikaruga*. Forcing your fuel to deplete as you fly around, you must prioritise between kills and refuelling. A remake is overdue.



LITTLE COMPUTER PEOPLE

Year: 1985 Designer: David Crane, Rich Gold

A primitive version of *The Sims*, *Little Computer People* allowed you to view the life of a digital man and his dog. Interaction was limited and the man often ignored text prompts, but in 1985 these faults could be accepted in favour of the technically impressive illusion.

was the beginning of a shift for me from actual programming to technical management and then to corporate management."

David also had to change the way that he did business, making significant sacrifices in the process. "Activision was a true start-up. You begin by personally buying into the company to help fund operations, and then cut your salary by 30 per cent. Then forego any personal life and start working until midnight every day. That will give you a sense of how your life is changed by starting a company. I couldn't afford gas, so I walked a mile each way to work. Not through the driving snow but, yes, at midnight most nights. And I learned that a can of tuna could make three brown-bag meals. When you try this for yourself, and you discover that you are having more fun than at any job you ever had, then you know you made the right career decision. As hard as the work was, it was intensely rewarding and life-altering. Then, once it became financially rewarding as well, it couldn't have been better."

The original Activision team assemble for a group shot in 1979.

Much of the reward from Activision was the ability to credit each designer for his own game, a desire Jim Levy understood from his experience in the music business. "Activision was actually more similar for me to the music and publishing industries, of which I had been a part, than it was for the Atari guys, who were treated as engineers without creative standing at Atari. As we were putting the company together, I listened closely to the four guys as they complained about the way Atari was run, and knew, from my experience in other creative industries, that it did not have to be that way. So, from the start, Activision was a place of enormous creative and entrepreneurial energy, where a heterogeneous mix of diverse talent came together and where each was respected for what they contributed to the company, no matter how 'different' they might have seemed."

As much as each programmer craved authorial recognition, however, both Alan and David agree that it was consumers who benefited most from the shift. "It really changed the way gamers identified with the games," says Alan. "It became very personal to them, similar to the way people respond to musicians and authors." "We each had our own unique style," adds David, "and as more games hit the market, it was nice to know you could count on a particular designer." "And the gamers responded," adds Alan. "Between 1982 and 1983, we were receiving 10,000 fan letters a week from gamers of all ages. We had to maintain a staff of 20-25 people just to respond to them."

Not everyone was as enthralled by Activision's existence as the gamers, however. Until 1979, Atari had enjoyed a 100 per cent market share of 2600's software catalogue sales, but all that was about to change and even newer console manufacturers like Coleco and Mattel didn't seem prepared despite the fact that more quality software would help their businesses grow. "The early videogame companies never got to grips with third-party publishers," agrees David. "I have to believe that someone in the organisations had the foresight to see the benefits, but that was never apparent in their official actions. They acted on the belief that any game cartridge sold by another publisher to play on their machine took money out of their pocket."

"Atari sued us just a couple of months before our first product release," remembers Jim. "However, we had done our legal homework and were able to respond and

"AS HARD AS THE WORK WAS, IT WAS INTENSELY REWARDING AND LIFE-ALTERING"





Are all movie licences rubbish? Activision proved very early on that they can definitely be great games.



Jim Levy, presumably getting into the Wild West spirit before work began on Activision's *Stampede*.

BRAND VISION

One of Activision's less-obvious strengths was the way every game could be identified as an Activision product from its appearance. This went further than just slapping the company logo on the box; the Activision insignia, designed by Jim Levy, actually appeared on your TV set as you played the game too, constantly reminding you of its origin and forcing you to associate the company with the quality you were experiencing. Each Activision game's packaging was completely recognisable, with every piece of box art being drawn in the same rainbow style. The company even gave away special fabric patches, using the same iconography, to those who achieved high scores in their games. The look didn't last forever, but it was used long enough to establish an identity for the company's products, and remains some of the most iconic imagery in the world of videogames. Some collectors will not stop until they have each and every one of those imaginatively designed boxes and the similarly envisioned promotional material that went with them.

ACTIVISION PRESENTS STARMASTER VIDEO GAME CARTRIDGE FOR USE WITH THE ATARI VIDEO COMPUTER SYSTEM

ACTIVISION ALL-STAR HOCKEY TEAM

ACTIVISION EXPLORERS' CLUB

ultimately settle that lawsuit without any real effect on the company."

By 1982, the question of whether third parties were valuable to platform holders became irrelevant. New 2600 publishers like Imagic and Parker Brothers followed Activision's lead, creating many of the console's defining titles. Activision also made a number of its own achievements with a line-up of games that are still adored today. *Pitfall!*, *H.E.R.O.*, *Kaboom!*, *River Raid* and many more sold millions of copies and were excellent games too. Such success showed very clearly that the industry needed third parties in order to thrive.

In the years following 1983's videogame crash, it was those companies most open to the idea of third parties that were able to survive, and as the old guard of 2600s and ColecoVisions died off it was the home computers that took their place – at least until the NES arrived in 1985. Using open architecture and data storage that any developer could freely use, as well as giving people the tools to create their own games, home computers like C64 were the perfect breeding ground for many of the third-party publishers that exist today. The unstoppable Electronic Arts got its break on Commodore 64, and Activision was also well poised to take advantage of the new hardware.

"In my original business plan, I envisioned the long-term growth of computers in the home as a major new industry for which a software industry would develop as hardware ownership grew," says Jim. "We planned an orderly transition into home computer software by 1984," adds David. But 1984 was clearly a bit late and though Activision enjoyed success on Commodore 64 with David's own *Ghostbusters* and *Little Computer People* it couldn't completely make the transition across from consoles before the market crash made a dent in their business.

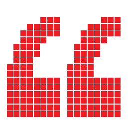


"ATARI SUED US JUST A COUPLE OF MONTHS BEFORE OUR FIRST PRODUCT RELEASE"

The videogame crash had serious consequences for the founding members of Activision. Jim explains: "During the 1986 recovery of the company from the industry mess of 1983-85, a couple of members of the board and I differed at times on certain management issues, which ultimately led to my decision to resign from the company in early-1987 to allow these directors to take the company in the direction they wanted to go."



He wasn't the only one to leave the company. Seeing the board's reluctance to move completely on to home computers as a mistake, Bob Whitehead and Alan Miller left to form their own company, Accolade, to concentrate solely on computer games. By 1994 the new firm had grown its annual sales revenue to $40 million. David stayed on



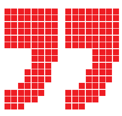
Where Are They Now?

DAVID CRANE



Since 1995 I have been designing browser-based games. I started Skyworks with Garry Kitchen (*Donkey Kong*, *Keystone Kapers*, and many others). We identified the internet as the next gaming platform, and found it well suited to our skills. We both still prefer working on smaller, more intimate and casual games than massive multi-man-year projects. Browser-based games tend to reach players who enjoy a more casual gaming experience – just like the games I made for the whole family in the Eighties.

I spend every day the same way I have since 1977 – at a computer, programming videogames. I am the only game guy from that Seventies era to have done this continuously since then. Due to my longevity I am coming to be known as the Charles Schultz of the videogame business. Mr Shultz personally drew his 'Peanuts' characters for 50 years. I have passed 30 years and continue to do it every day.



SMOKE AND MIRRORS

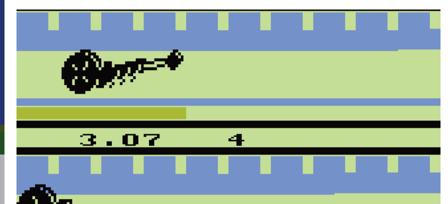
Was Atari really as hedonistic as its reputation suggests?

"The days of lobby hot-tub parties and clouds of marijuana smoke billowing out of offices were gone before I joined Atari," explains David. "Atari's working environment was like most engineering companies: cubicles with computer terminals and game system emulators. At Activision we used a similar arrangement, but we learned a better cubicle arrangement… We realised that much of the quality of our games came from the combined expertise of our group. We set up an open lab environment – now known as the bullpen – where each designer had a cubicle surrounding an open common area. Anything on the screen was fair game for comment… Every game benefited from the experience in the room."

"I never observed any 'hedonistic' activities at Atari," insists Alan. "People in the engineering group worked very hard. It's true that it was a casual environment and the kind of clothes you wore was not important in the engineering group. Results were what counted.

"There's a misconception that drug use was common at Atari," continues Alan. "It wasn't. I worked at Atari between 1977 and 1979 and never saw any illegal drugs used on the premises. It was the same at Activision and Accolade. I observed no illegal drug use in any of these companies, although it was easy to find everywhere else in the San Francisco Bay Area."





Activision's very first game was *Dragster*. Though it's not as well remembered as others, it's still a fun two-player racer.



Alan Miller and David Crane at the Game Developers Choice Awards.

out of loyalty to the company he helped build, and created a few more classics in this period, but eventually he walked too. "The new management team had neither the skills nor the experience to get the company through the tough times," he laments.

Activision managed to limp on without its visionary founders, but it didn't get far, as David points out. "Activision was once the biggest name in games. But with the management change of the mid-Eighties, the company lost sight of the value of the name and its historic position in the industry."

Alan continues: "Around 1990, when Accolade was successful and Activision was struggling, we negotiated with the largest shareholder of Activision to purchase a controlling interest in the company. We felt there was a lot of brand equity in the name Activision – even though it had formally changed the company name to Mediagenic – as well as ongoing value in the game properties. We were very close to completing that deal, but we ultimately backed away. Activision was just bleeding too much red ink."

18 years on and Activision is still around of course, but as David quite rightly points out, it is not the same company that he founded back in 1979. With poor decision after poor decision, the company made its inevitable slide into bankruptcy, and there was nothing left of the company but the name. Bobby Kotick came along and bought the company for a few hundred thousand dollars. But what he was really buying was a brand name – and that brand name was worth an estimated $50 million.

After the purchase, the company offices in Silicon Valley were closed, the assets auctioned, and all employees laid off. The new owner opened a new office in southern California and proceeded to start a new videogame company. It's been around two decades since David, Alan and Jim were involved with Activision, but it is clear that all three still hold the company in high regard, despite the troublesome Mediagenic years. Alan Miller summarises: "Over the last 15 or so years, Kotick and the rest of the people at Activision have done a great job of growing that company from a very weakened state to an immensely important game publisher. With its announced merger with Vivendi's game group, Activision will post over $3 billion in annual sales. And it goes without saying that it's created some extremely popular games."

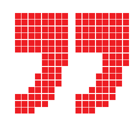
But would Activision be the powerhouse it is today if four guys from Atari and an imaginative outsider hadn't laid the foundations of the industry to begin with? We don't think so, and neither does Jim Levy. "We at Activision always thought of the industry as a long-term growth industry that ultimately would achieve what it has today. There have been times over the years when the larger business world doubted this, but we never did. Obviously, I am pleased to see an industry today that looks a lot like what I wrote about almost 30 years ago in the original Activision business plan."

Where Are They Now?

JIM LEVY



I am mostly retired today but still have my hand in a number of projects, some for profit and some not. I live now in Sonoma, California, about one and a half hours north of Silicon Valley, but still visit there frequently and assist new companies in their development… none in the videogames industry at this time.





H.E.R.O. was one of Activision's most popular classic games and was converted from the 2600 to several other 8-bit formats.



Jim Levy with Cliff Crowder at an Activision reunion in 1996.

SOMETHING OLD SOMETHING NEW



RETRO GAMER LOOKS BACK AT SOME OF THE CLASSIC FRANCHISES THAT ARE BEING REVIVED FOR NEXT-GENERATION SYSTEMS. THIS MONTH WE LOOK AT THE LATEST INSTALMENT IN THE POPULAR METAL SLUG SERIES – METAL SLUG 7

Game Title: Metal Slug 7
System: Xbox Live Arcade
Interviewee: SNK Metal Slug 7 team

Retro Gamer: Why did you decide to create a new *Metal Slug* game and what was the reason for creating it on the DS as opposed to the PSP?
SNK: As you may know, we launched *Metal Slug Anthology* on the PSP, PS2 and Wii this year. We feel that the Nintendo DS audience is very broad and accessible, and considered it a great platform to provide a fresh experience of *Metal Slug* for both casual/new gamers and hardcore gamers.

RG: Were there any particular problems you faced during development?
SNK: Whenever we develop a new *Metal Slug* franchise we always give careful consideration to new enemies and gimmicks to help keep the series as fresh and exciting as possible. We're always very careful when creating and using those new features to ensure they meet the image of the *Metal Slug* world.

In order to provide the same quality as the past *Metal Slug* games, we used all of the available main memory of the DS. It was really a continuation of trial and error. We also spent a lot of time trying to maintain the series' distinctive and fluid animation quality.

RG: What do you think makes *Metal Slug 7* stand out from other games in the series?
SNK: In addition to the new stages and Slugs, the greatest selling point of this title is being able to feel the same quality of elaborately depicted realistic dot-image graphics in the palm of your hand.

Players will find a host of new Slugs and enemies along with various traps and puzzles. The new weapon Thunder Shot, which follows and attacks enemies, debuts in this title, as do the new Slugs: Slug Trolley – up to four of these can be linked together to run faster in the coal-mine stage, and Slug Gigantus – a behemoth-class Slug, which boasts astounding firepower.

RG: Would you consider eventually porting the game to something like WiiWare or Xbox Live Arcade?
SNK: Yes, we're always considering bringing the *Metal Slug* series into the multiplatform arena. Some of the past franchise titles are available on Wii or Xbox Live Arcade now. Furthermore, we're thinking of not only porting the game to those platforms, but releasing an original online *Metal Slug* game in the future.

How long did the game take to create and how many people worked on it?

We can't count exactly how many people were involved in this project (around 20-30 development staff all the time). It took a year to complete

RG: Why are there no branching levels this time?
SNK: We planned to include branching levels. However, as we were focusing on refining the quality of the graphics and gameplay, there was not enough room to add branching levels, in the capacity of memory size and of our development schedule.

RG: Where did the Combat School concept originate?
SNK: We decided to add Combat School mode to provide more to 'savour' after the player has completed the main mission. Combat School mode originated from *Metal Slug* on the Neo-Geo CD. This time, however, there are 80 missions. These missions are put into categories such as 'Base Attack', 'Rescue Hostages', 'Annihilate Objective', 'Recover supplies', and 'Special Training'. Some stages appear only in Combat School mode. As your ranking increases you'll find [the instructor] Cynthia's attitude towards you changes. Please do not miss out on this.

RG: Why do you think the *Metal Slug* series remains so popular with gamers?
SNK: We give careful consideration to adding new enemy content and gimmicks to keep the series fresh and exciting. Using our experience, which has been built up through the development of the *Metal Slug* series since 1996, we've learnt how best to set up the enemy units and design the environments in every franchise. The most important thing is our development team's love for the series.

RG: How long did the game take to create and how many people worked on it?
SNK: We can't count exactly how many people were involved in this project (around 20-30 development staff all the time). It took a year to complete.

RG: Which of the new weapons is your favourite and why?
SNK: Our favourite is the 'Thunder Shot', which follows and attacks enemies. This weapon has an amazing power to attack enemies.

RG: Are there any more *Metal Slug* games planned?
SNK: We're currently discussing this with our development team. However, it takes some time to develop a new *Metal Slug*. There are very few dot-graphic designers who can depict intricate *Metal Slug* graphics.

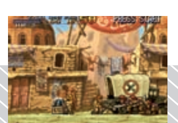
RG: How would you like *Metal Slug 7* to be remembered?
SNK: We want to satisfy hardcore *Metal Slug* fans with this title, and also hope it's regarded as the most artistic 2D action-shooting game on the DS. Please don't miss out on the first *Metal Slug* on the DS!



Metal Slug Timeline



METAL SLUG: SUPER VEHICLE
Year Released: 1996
Version: Neo-Geo



METAL SLUG 2
Year Released: 1998
Version: Neo-Geo



METAL SLUG 1ST MISSION
Year Released: 1999
Version: Neo-Geo Pocket Color



METAL SLUG X: SUPER VEHICLE
Year Released: 1999
Version: Neo-Geo



METAL SLUG 2ND MISSION
Year Released: 2000
Version: Neo-Geo Pocket



METAL SLUG 3
Year Released: 2000
Version: Neo-Geo



METAL SLUG 4
Year Released: 2002
Version: Neo-Geo



» The Combat School mode, which first made an appearance in *Metal Slug CD*, also makes a comeback, and adds plenty of replay value to the game.

» *Metal Slug 7* introduces three new vehicles [Slugs] into the canon: the Slug Trolley, Slug Gigantus and Heavy Armor.

METAL SLUG: MOBILE
Year Released: 2004
Version:
Mobile

METAL SLUG ADVANCE
Year Released: 2004
Version:
GBA

METAL SLUG 5
Year Released: 2004
Version:
Neo-Geo

METAL SLUG: MOBILE IMPACT
Year Released: 2005
Version: Mobile

METAL SLUG 6
Year Released: 2006
Version:
PS2

METAL SLUG 3D
Year Released: 2006
Version:
PS2

METAL SLUG MOBILE 3
Year Released: 2007
Version:
Mobile

METAL SLUG 7
Year Released: 2008
Version:
DS

THE MAKING OF...

BOUNDER

A BOUNCING TENNIS BALL DOESN'T SEEM LIKE A KILLER VIDEOGAME CONCEPT. BUT THROW IN WICKED LEVEL DESIGN, A NEW PERSPECTIVE ON PLATFORM GAMING, AND CARTOON-ESQUE HUMOUR AND YOU'VE GOT A WINNER. CHRIS SHRIGLEY TALKS TO CRAIG GRANNELL ABOUT HOW THESE IDEAS LED TO BOUNDER, ONE OF GREMLIN GRAPHICS' MOST ORIGINAL GAMES



IN THE KNOW

» **PUBLISHER:** GREMLIN GRAPHICS

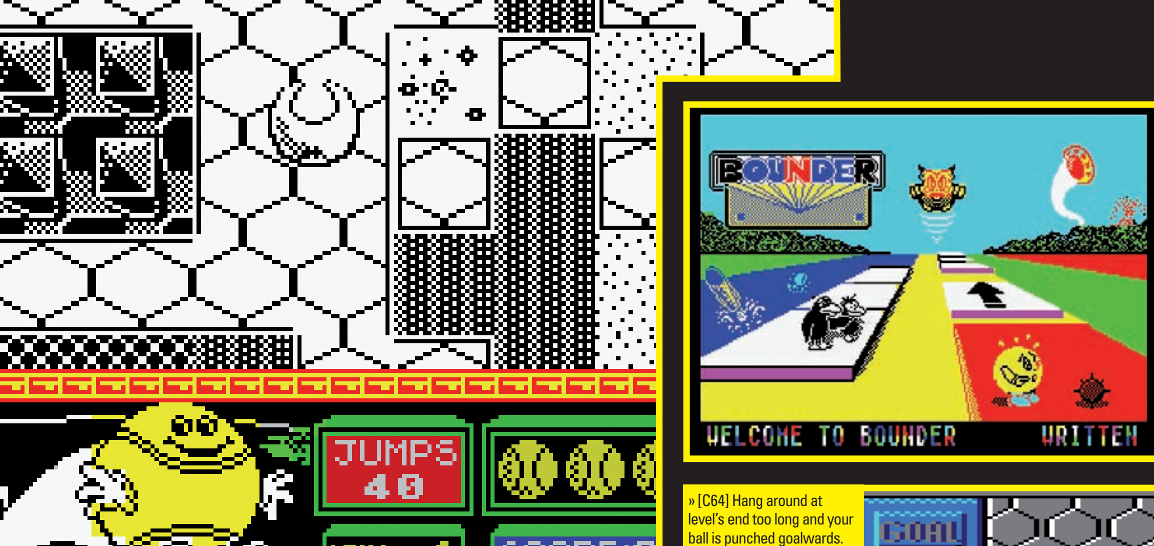
» **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE

» **RELEASED:** 1986

» **PLATFORM:** C64 (CONVERTED TO AMSTRAD CPC, COMMODORE 16/ PLUS/4, MSX AND ZX SPECTRUM)

» **GENRE:** ARCADE

» **EXPECT TO PAY:** £2+



» [C16] The C64's little brother gets a surprisingly faithful conversion, albeit with fewer enemies and levels.



» [C64] Hang around at level's end too long and your ball is punched goalwards.



» [C64] Yes, you're in hell. Well, maybe not, but you might feel it in *Bounder*'s infuriatingly difficult later levels.

On a particularly gorgeous English summer's day, Chris Shrigley, Andrew Green and Robert Toone were hanging out in a local park, playing tennis. The trio of friends had already experienced minor success in the games industry working separately, and were plotting to team up on a title. "By this point, Rob had moved into the games design side of things, and Andy and I were all over the programming," recalls Chris.

Sprawled out under a tree, the friends started chatting about their latest favourite game, Capcom's *Exed Exes* – a top-down shooter with parallax scrolling. "I'd been playing around with scrolling techniques on the C64, trying to emulate the arcade game's parallax scroll, and I'd pretty much figured it out," says Chris. "We started throwing around ideas about how to use it, and I suggested a tennis ball rolling around an *Exed Exes* environment, but with gameplay similar to *Marble Madness*. After much discussion, we ended up with a bouncing tennis ball, and a top-down view with platforms to bounce around on – pretty much how the final game ended up."

As anyone who's played *Bounder* will know, the arcade influence is clear: the game is slick and polished high-concept gaming – and hard as nails. "We were all avid arcade game players, and the nature of the games we were playing constantly prodded us and reminded us of our desire to emulate them," considers Chris.

However, unlike many of its contemporaries, *Bounder* became a very different game to the arcade titles that influenced it. Although the forced vertical scrolling and parallax graphical effect of *Exed Exes* remained, all that *Marble Madness* brought to the table was a spherical protagonist and a penchant for devious level design. Rather than rolling around levels, *Bounder*'s ball continually bounces, tasking you with getting to the next safe platform while avoiding monsters and traps, and trying to locate boost pads to cross huge canyons. Think of a platform game flipped 90 degrees, with a hint of hopscotch – or a vertically scrolling *Trailblazer*, but with more complex level design and myriad psychotic enemies out for your blood – and you're halfway there. "Ultimately, the game ended up being completely original," argues Chris. "I can't think of any other game that it's like."

Although the idea for *Bounder* formed rapidly, its creation was prolonged. The team spent the entire summer and most of the following year fashioning the game, although this was partly down to the programming methods the team used. "Every last bit of code was written in machine code, using a program called Zoom Monitor. Everything was mnemonics and hex. There was no symbolic or portable code whatsoever, and no compiling – we just typed it in, saved the memory to floppy disc, and ran it," says Chris, referring to that period as 'the good times'. "We'd leave a number of NOPs around each section of code or function, so we could extend or add to it using a JMP to the extra code. The code got a bit unmanageable towards the end, which made it difficult to find some of the more obscure crash bugs we had. It was a crazy, primitive way to write a big game like *Bounder*, but those were the tools we had."

Despite these tricky, early programming sessions making *Bounder*'s gestation a difficult process, Chris has fond memories of programming the Commodore 64. "It was a lovely machine to programme, and at the time, everything I did on it was a breakthrough – or at least it was to me," he says. "I remember the first time I switched out the ROMs and got access to all the extra, lovely RAM hiding underneath, or put sprites in the borders, or wrote my first sprite multiplexor." Of all the machines he's worked on, Chris reckons the C64 was the one he became most intimate with, and he misses those days: "With the sheer size and scope of what today's hardware can do, and rapid turnarounds, it's increasingly difficult to get that level of comfort. I think that's

CONVERSION CAPERS

Although *Bounder* was initially created on the C64 – and well suited to that platform, due to the game's arcade-like nature – its success ensured conversions soon found their way to other systems. Perhaps surprisingly, said conversions were remarkably faithful. Although the ZX Spectrum version (which spawned a near-identical MSX release) lacks the sound, colour and parallax scrolling of its C64 cousin, the level maps are similarly devious, and the game is even tougher, due to its speedy scrolling.

While the Spectrum port lacks colour, the Amstrad one is almost too vibrant, with its backgrounds distracting from safe platforms. However, it's nonetheless a pretty, fun conversion. Perhaps the most impressive, though, is the C16 release, which shoehorns a fair chunk of the original into the tiny Commodore machine, even including the parallax-scrolling effect, albeit with a simplified background.



THE MAKING OF… BOUNDER

» [C64] *Bounder*'s final level. We cheated to get here, because retaining some vestige of sanity is important.

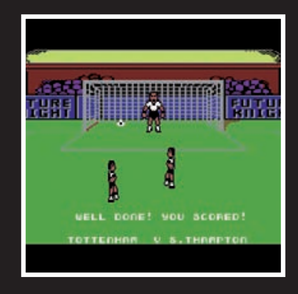
» [C64] Help? You'll need it when *Bounder* thoughtfully respawns your ball in a deathtrap after you've died mere seconds earlier.

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

FOOTBALLER OF THE YEAR (PICTURED)
SYSTEMS: AMSTRAD CPC, ATARI 8-BIT, COMMODORE 16, COMMODORE 64, COMMODORE PLUS/4, MSX, ZX SPECTRUM
YEAR: 1986

ROCK 'N ROLL RACING
SYSTEM: GAME BOY ADVANCED
YEAR: 2003

STUNTMAN: IGNITION
SYSTEMS: PS3, XBOX 360
YEAR: 2007



why older machines are so cool – very raw and base, with lots of registers to poke stuff into, and lots of tricks needed to get the most out of them."

With *Bounder*, it's the scroller that Chris remains proudest of: "The technique I came up with eventually involved scrolling the parallax character data (in memory) the opposite way to the direction of the scroll. If you scrolled the data at the same speed as the scroll, the parallax characters essentially stood still, while the unaffected characters seemed to slide across them. Changing the relative speeds produced different parallax effects." Chris recalls that when he first achieved his desired effect, he thought it was stunning, and when Rob and Andy first saw it, they were blown away. "We called it 'scrollyvision', which was wonderfully quaint," laughs Chris, noting that his game might well have been the first on the platform to offer parallax scrolling.

With the game's foundations dealt with and the main graphical effect working, the team set about creating and populating *Bounder*'s many levels. Chris unashamedly notes that the trio mostly made things up as they went along. "We had that basic premise of the tennis ball bouncing up and down and the scroller, and then Rob, who was a big cartoon fan, wanted to get a cartoony feel into the game," remembers Chris, hence the ball falling into the distance and exploding in a smoke ring upon hitting the ground – a homage to the *Road Runner* cartoons.

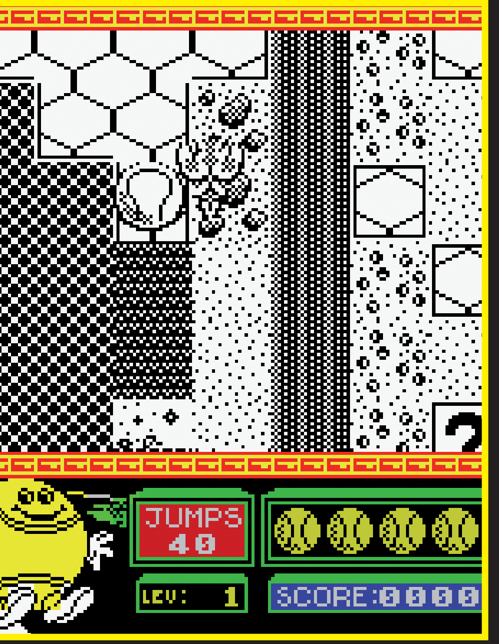
Levels were designed on squared paper, with Rob marking each square with a number that corresponded to a block of two-by-two characters. "We typed everything in by hand, in hex," laughs Chris at the primitive development environment he once endured, although he notes that he did eventually write a nifty character and sprite editor that "saved our sanity, especially with animations".

Once the basics were done, enemies were added "à la carte", in Chris's words. "We'd come up with a bright idea and just code it up, and the game's other elements – like the traps – were designed in the same way. It was a very organic thing." One aspect of *Bounder* Chris isn't willing to take the credit (or blame) for, though, is the game's toughness, which caused even hardened gamers to smash the odd joystick to pieces. "Rob's the guilty one when it comes to the levels, so blame him for any pain and suffering you experienced playing *Bounder*," suggests Chris, although he admits he created a couple of the levels, which can be spotted from his initials being embedded within them. "Some of *Bounder*'s levels are ridiculously difficult, particularly the last one which I think Rob designed to be impossible," he admits. "The game is very unforgiving, and it's just luck picking the good bonus tiles."

Bounder is also mean with restart points after your ball has plummeted to its untimely doom – you're often dumped on a tile where the only exits are 'death', 'death' and 'more death'. "The restart points are pretty dumb," concedes Chris. "The code just scans the visible map and finds a random 'safe' tile to drop you on, but sometimes that isn't necessarily the safest of places!" Chris notes, though, that although the game is way too hard, many games back then were really tough, and game design theory was



» [Spectrum] It's just as well the Speccy has rubber keys – it'll bounce when you hurl it at the wall after getting frustrated with *Bounder*.



ON THE REBOUND(ER)

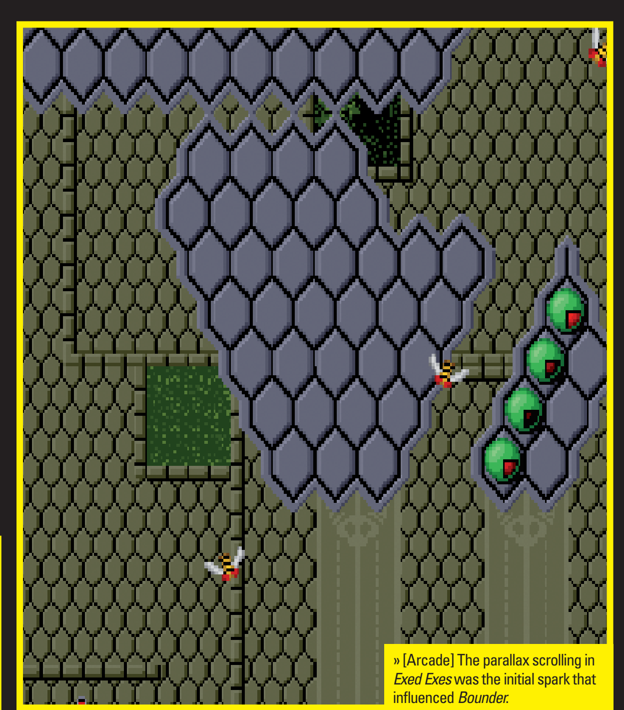
"There were two reasons for making *Re-Bounder*," says Chris on *Bounder*'s 1987 sequel. "Gremlin wanted to capitalise on the success *Bounder* enjoyed, and we wanted to try to remake *Bounder* using the new resources and experience at our disposal."

Ideas mooted for the original game were subsequently rolled into the sequel, as Chris explains: "We wanted end-of-level bosses in *Bounder*, but ended up with our jumping bonus game, and so in *Re-Bounder* we had bosses. Sure, they weren't that good, but we had them. And we tried to improve on every aspect of the original, with a complicated map, levels that scrolled in different directions, additional weapons, and new enemies."

Today, however, Chris is philosophical about the sequel. "We went all out, throwing everything we could think of – and everything we wanted to do in the original – into the mix," he admits. "Did it work? Did we make a better game? I don't think so, to be honest. Like most sequels, it's rare to make something better than the original. There was an innocence and originality to *Bounder* that we completely lost with *Re-Bounder*."






» [Arcade] The parallax scrolling in *Exed Exes* was the initial spark that influenced *Bounder*.


» [C64] Designer Rob was a bit of a cartoon fan, and this influenced the design of *Bounder*'s enemies.

primitive. And with the team's interest in arcade games designed to relieve you of as much money as possible, difficult gameplay inevitably sneaked through.

In order to avoid gamers cracking entirely, the team threw a last-minute lifeline their way by way of *Bounder*'s bonus game. It tasks you with bouncing on a number of scattered question-mark tiles using the least number of jumps possible, in order to amass huge bonus points and extra lives. "There wasn't much thought behind it, to be honest," admits Chris. "I coded it in a couple of days, because we thought something was needed at the end of each level to break the gameplay up a bit." Originally, the team wanted end-of-level bosses, like in vertical shooters of the day, but the jumping game won out, due to it utilising elements already written. "I think we all would have liked it to have been a little more compelling," laughs Chris.

With the game complete, the trio's lives rapidly took a turn for the surreal. The game was sent to just one company – Gremlin Graphics – who within a fortnight asked the lads to visit Sheffield. Thrilled, they met Gremlin founder Ian Stewart just before Christmas 1985, during a bitterly cold, snowy winter – but got a present they'd always dreamed of. "He said Gremlin wanted to publish *Bounder* and, to our surprise, offered us all in-house jobs," remembers Chris. "We were blown away – this was way beyond anything we ever expected." And so in January, the three started commuting to Sheffield by train, mingling with the likes of Tony Crowther, Ben Daglish, Pete Harrap and Jason Perkins.

But the good fortune didn't end there. *Zzap!64* gleefully pinned a Gold Medal on the daredevil tennis ball in its tenth issue, calling *Bounder* "an absorbing, demanding and totally innovative approach to the ageing platform formula," a review that undoubtedly spurred on the game's strong sales. "We were living a dream," says Chris. "We'd have been happy had the game done nothing, because we were working for Gremlin and earning a wage making games. But the positive reception *Bounder* got was icing on a very delicious cake."

For Chris, who now has a lengthy track record in the industry, *Bounder* remains a highlight. "Writing the game was a fantastic experience, and is all mixed up with some of the best times in my youth," he says. "The summer we worked on *Bounder* was a blast, full of videogames and breakdancing. The Eighties were in full swing, and the world was in the grasp of the Cold War, but all we cared about was having a good time and writing games." Chris remembers how he and his friends talked constantly about *Bounder*, fantasised about getting it published, and naively dreamed about becoming industry 'stars'. "The game took many, many hours of hard work and lots and lots of beer to complete, but when we finally put the disk in the jiffy bag and mailed it to Gremlin, it was an amazing feeling – one I've never had since, I might add," says Chris, drawing the interview to a close. "Working as part of a small, enthusiastic team, on your own stuff, and being able to make design and implementation decisions at the drop of a hat, is the best thing in the world… Well, apart from cake."



05

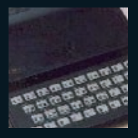


SUPER SPRINT

IAN MARKS THINKS ATARI'S RACER IS WHEELY GREAT



- » **PUBLISHER:** ATARI
- » **RELEASED:** 1986
- » **GENRE:** DRIVING
- » **FEATURED HARDWARE:** ARCADE
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** £500+



HISTORY

Ahh, *Super Sprint*. What a great game, and not just because it was one of the few games I was any good at in the arcades. No, *Super Sprint* was great because everything about it felt right and beautifully balanced.

In the early-Seventies, Atari released *Sprint*. It was black and white with chunky graphics, but it played well. Then, in the Eighties, Atari came back with *Super Sprint*. This new game played fantastically and looked amazing. The graphics were perfect, with miniature racing cars rushing around a tight, twisty track. The little man with the chequered flag, the helicopter, the banked corners and the jumps – it all looked gorgeous. Finally, I could be Nigel Mansell, even if my 15-year-old hormones weren't up to growing his moustache.

But the way it drove was the key to *Super Sprint*'s greatness. Spinning the big wheel, as you were about to turn corners was completely over the top (this was no *Hard Drivin'*), but it worked. It meant you could pull off amazing moves, rushing through the opening barriers and leaving the trailing field to crash into them as they closed.

If you played the multiplayer cabinet, the joy of getting to the spanner first was indescribable. Especially if it was your third one of the game, as you knew that if you won now the super traction or turbo acceleration would be yours to command. Rightly or wrongly, I always considered that *Super Sprint* was as good a game to play with your mates as *Gauntlet*, due to it featuring the same highs when you win, and lows when you lose.

Home conversions followed but they just weren't the same. You needed to be there, you needed the smoky arcade atmosphere and two other people with a mountain of 10p coins in their sweaty hands. Of all the arcade cabinets you can buy on eBay, I wish I could own this one. One day my bid will be accepted, and then all I'll have to worry about is how to get it home… oh, and where to put it… oh, and getting the old gang back together to play it… happy days.

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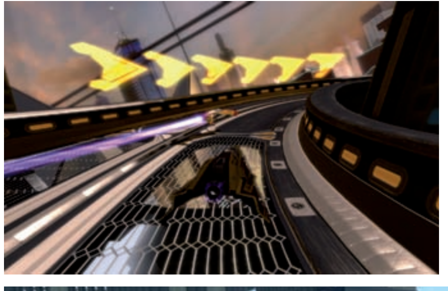


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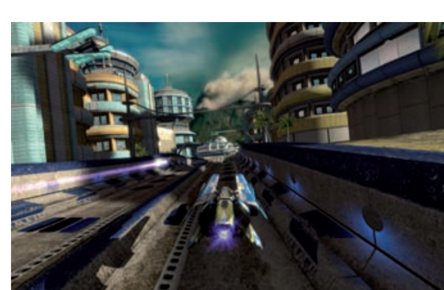
» **NAME:** IAN MARKS
» **JOINED:** 17 AUG 2008
» **LOCATION:** LEICESTER
» **OCCUPATION:** TEACHER
» **FAV GAMES SYSTEM:** ZX SPECTRUM
» **BIO:** GOT INTO GAMES WHEN MY FATHER BOUGHT ME A ZX81. STILL INTO GAMES 27 YEARS LATER, BUT MISSING THE OLD DAYS. MODERN GAMES ARE FUN BUT SOMETHING OF THE EARLY EXCITEMENT HAS GONE.

RETRORATED

It's another strong showing from Microsoft's console this month, but Sony's PSN service finally comes of age with a stunning update to the *WipEout* franchise that blows previous home versions away. And let's not forget the Wii, which is finally getting some decent WiiWare releases. The three download services have never had it so good.









retro GAMER SIZZLER

WIPEOUT HD

INFORMATION

» **PUBLISHER:** SONY
» **DOWNLOAD:** PLAYSTATION NETWORK
» **COST:** £11.99

***WipEout HD* is a tricky game to rate. On the one hand, it's nothing more than an amalgamation of some of the best levels and gameplay modes to appear on Sony's two PSP *WipEout*s. On the other hand, it's the best *WipEout* we've played on a home console since *2097*. Make no mistake, while *WipEout HD* is little more than a high-resolution update of *Pure* and *Pulse*, it's quite simply amazing and should be purchased by anyone who's a fan of hi-tech racers or the franchise in general.**

First up, *WipEout HD* looks absolutely stunning and sets a new benchmark for the series and similar racing games. With its silky smooth frame rate (locked at 60fps), multiple lighting and particle effects – all produced at a glorious 1080p resolution – it's a truly gorgeous-looking beast that shows up virtually every other racer we've seen on a next-generation machine. Throw in a thumping soundtrack that includes tracks from the likes of Kraftwerk, DJ Fresh and Noisia plus some truly vicious-sounding effects, and the end result is one of the most giddying and exhilarating rollercoaster rides we've been on for some time.

Still, there's more to *WipEout HD* than its pulsating soundtrack and exceptional visuals, and we're pleased to report that the included gameplay modes are every bit as impressive as its stunning aesthetics.

For starters, the controls are fantastic. The craft respond brilliantly to even the slightest player input and even the included Sixaxis mode works really well (unlike in *MotorStorm* or *Lair*), meaning that you can really appreciate the eight beautifully crafted tracks that have been included. Even if you do struggle with the controls – *WipEout HD* gets tough very quickly – there is a new Pilot Assist mode that eases you into the high-speed racing more gently.

The way you unlock everything is also handled particularly well, with *WipEout HD* utilising that same honeycomb grid approach that worked so well in *WipEout Pulse*, meaning that it's possible to experience a fair amount of *WipEout HD*'s varied game modes even if you do find yourself stuck on a certain section.

The included modes may be missing the much-touted Elimination and Head 2 Head events, but there's still plenty here for *WipEout* aficionados to sink their teeth into. Race and Tournament modes are exactly as you'd expect and pit you against a variety of other craft, while Time Trial and Speed Lap require you to beat specific times on single or multiple laps. Then there's the excellent Zone mode (first seen in *WipEout Fusion*), which sees your craft getting increasingly faster as it hurtles through the mesmerisingly beautiful levels. Imagine a high-definition version of the bike chase in *Tron* and you'll have a good idea of what to expect.

Even when you've exhausted *WipEout HD*'s single-player mode, the excellent online section will still ensure that you have plenty to do until all of the promised downloadable content begins to appear.

You could argue that £12 is a lot for what is effectively eight tracks from the two *WipEout* PSP releases, but it's all been put together with so much skill, style and finesse that many simply won't care. Indeed, we wouldn't have been disappointed if Sony had put this out and pawned it off as a full-price release, so the fact you can pick it up for just over a tenner is nothing less than sensational. Simply the best game currently available on the PlayStation Network.

94%



BRAID

INFORMATION
- » **PUBLISHER:** MICROSOFT
- » **DOWNLOAD:** XBOX LIVE ARCADE
- » **COST:** 1,200 POINTS

With its whimsical graphics, soothing soundtrack and devilishly designed puzzles, *Braid* has received a lot of attention lately. Unlike many other hyped titles though, Jonathan Blow's quirky little platformer is definitely deserving of all its accolades and it's proven itself to be as clever as it is beautiful.

Effectively a thinking man's *Super Mario Bros.*, *Braid*'s main concept comes from the constant manipulation of time. Whether it's by rewinding recent on-screen events, manipulating a shadow of yourself, or simply pausing the game by standing still, *Braid* will constantly challenge you, often infuriate you, but always mesmerise you with its beauty, structure and cleverness.

It takes time to grasp how each world works and it's rather pricey compared to many other games on the service, but Blow's efforts need rewarding, so do yourself a favour and download this little gem.

92%

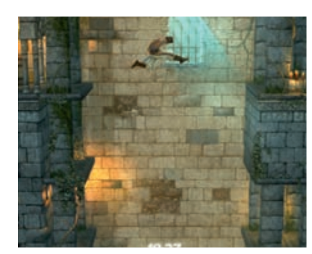
PRINCE OF PERSIA CLASSIC

INFORMATION
- » **PUBLISHER:** UBISOFT
- » **DOWNLOAD:** PLAYSTATION NETWORK
- » **COST:** £7.99

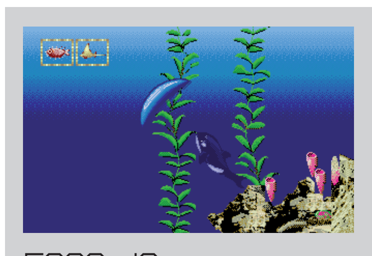
If Prince Of *Persia Classic* looks rather familiar, it's because we first reviewed the Xbox Live Arcade version back in **Retro Gamer** issue 40. Suffice to say this new version is almost identical, although we actually found the Prince slightly easier to control with the PlayStation 3's DualShock 3.

Anyway, for those who aren't aware, *Prince Of Persia Classic* is essentially a remake of Jordan Mechner's 21-year-old original – albeit with impossibly pretty visuals, incredibly slick animation and moves from *The Sands Of Time* – and bloody good it is, too. But what impresses us the most, even now, a good year and a half after its original release, is just how well the Prince's new moves work within the framework of Mechner's original level design. Yes, it's ridiculously difficult in places and the sword fighting is still a real pain to get to grips with, but *Prince Of Persia Classic* remains one of the best examples of updating a classic game that we've seen on Sony's service and is bound to please fans of the original. Don't miss it.


87%



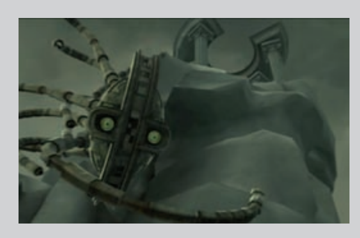




ECCO JR.
- » **PUBLISHER:** SEGA
- » **DOWNLOAD:** VIRTUAL CONSOLE
- » **COST:** 800 POINTS

We were pleased to see *Ecco Jr.* finally getting a release over here (it was originally confined to the US and Australia), but now we've played it we really wish Sega hadn't bothered. Boring and painfully dull, this is a horribly cut-down version of the enjoyable Mega Drive games that ups the kiddie factor and therefore becomes painfully twee to play through. Devoid of any challenge and with some terrible music, even *Ecco* fans will be seeing red. Stay well away.

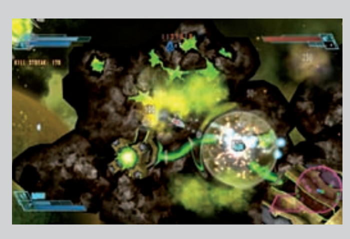
35%



LINGER IN SHADOWS
- » **PUBLISHER:** SONY
- » **DOWNLOAD:** PLAYSTATION NETWORK
- » **COST:** £1.99

Remember those old demos that used to make your friends' Amigas look so impressive? Well, here's one on the PS3 and it really is breathtaking stuff. Unfortunately, despite being an incredibly accomplished tech demo it isn't an actual game and requires you to do little more than shake the Sixaxis controller at the right time. It's great to see Plastic's fantastic achievement reaching a potentially huge audience, but *Linger In Shadows* is sadly all style and no real substance.

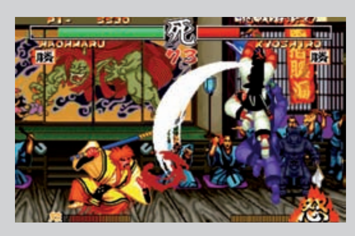
20%



SHRED NEBULA
- » **PUBLISHER:** CRUNCHTIME GAMES
- » **DOWNLOAD:** XBOX LIVE ARCADE
- » **COST:** 800 POINTS

We weren't expecting too much from *Shred Nebula*, so we're pleased that it's turned out to be a rather fun shooter. While it refreshingly refuses to copy Live Arcade's many *Robotron* clones, *Shred Nebula*'s biggest issue is that it's a little too complicated for its own good and features an overly complex control system that would make *Defender* fans weep. Still, if you can get past the steep learning curve you'll discover a slick little shooter that definitely deserves persevering with.

70%



SAMURAI SHODOWN II
- » **PUBLISHER:** SNK PLAYMORE
- » **DOWNLOAD:** XBOX LIVE ARCADE
- » **COST:** 800 POINTS

After being so impressed with the Virtual Console version of this classic fighter, we're somewhat disappointed with the Live Arcade offering. While the online play is a nice touch, it's often hampered by annoying lag. Then there's the fact that everything feels a little sluggish. It's still an exceptionally solid beat-'em-up, but we can't help but feel that this latest Live Arcade offering from SNK Playmore is a bit of a missed opportunity.

80%

RETRORATED

» DOWNLOAD RELEASES





CASTLE CRASHERS

INFORMATION
- » **PUBLISHER:** MICROSOFT
- » **DOWNLOAD:** XBOX LIVE ARCADE
- » **COST:** 1,200 POINTS

The Behemoth's latest arcade release has been knocking around in one form or another since 2005, but it's now finally available on Xbox Live Arcade. The big question though is: was it worth the wait? The answer? Sort of…

With its vibrant sprites, humorous animation and bright Day-Glo locations, *Castle Crashers* looks the part and is easily one of the most colourful and character-driven games to appear on the console. Sadly, however, its gameplay just isn't up to the same standard.

It can become all too easy to get lost among the on-screen chaos and even with a wealth of combos and pick-ups, the gameplay soon gets a bit samey. You could argue that this is a problem with most scrolling fighters, but it seems more noticeable with *Castle Crashers*.

Still, it's good fun while it lasts and the early online issues have now been fixed. So, pick it up if you fancy some old-school fun.

81%

MEGA MAN 9

INFORMATION
- » **PUBLISHER:** CAPCOM
- » **DOWNLOAD:** XBOX LIVE ARCADE, VIRTUAL CONSOLE, PLAYSTATION NETWORK
- » **COST:** 800 POINTS (XBOX LIVE ARCADE), 1,000 POINTS (VIRTUAL CONSOLE), £6.99 (PSN)

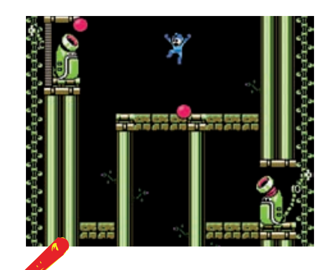
A word of warning: Capcom's *Mega Man 9* is not for the faint hearted. If you're the sort of gamer who likes to be led by the hand, has to be wowed by next-generation visuals and doesn't like too much of a challenge then stop reading right now.

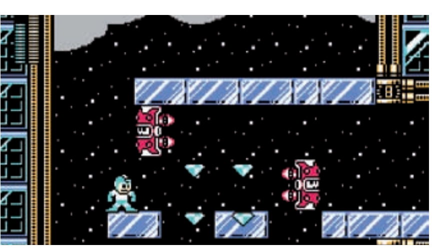
Right. Who's still with us?

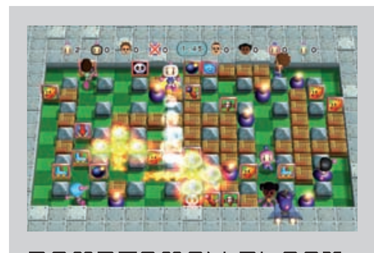
Okay, now for the good news. Despite the unforgiving difficulty level, *Mega Man 9* is a truly impressive game and will be appreciated by anyone who likes a good challenge and anyone who really enjoyed the NES originals. Level design is truly marvellous in places, the visuals accurately mimic the 8-bit versions – right down to the flickering, which can be switched off if required – while the boss patterns are constantly challenging, but never impossible. The music is also of an exceptionally high standard and again, it really captures the spirit of the *Mega Man* games on the NES. What with *Bionic Commando: Rearmed* and now *Mega Man 9*, Capcom is truly on fine form. We can only hope it now decides to turn its attention to *Strider*.



76%





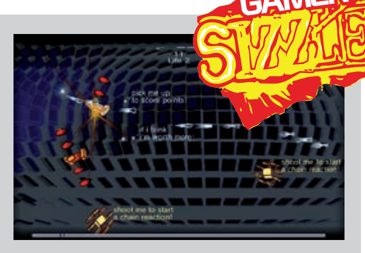


BOMBERMAN BLAST

- » **PUBLISHER:** HUDSON
- » **DOWNLOAD:** WIIWARE
- » **COST:** 1,000 POINTS

With so many *Bomberman* games recently focusing on dull story modes and numerous mini-games, it's refreshing to see one go back to basics and just offer some good, old-fashioned blasting action. Playable online and allowing up to eight players to take part, *Bomberman Blast* is a great alternative to the VC offering that's already available and includes plenty of new arenas and gameplay modes. Quite simply the best *Bomberman* on Nintendo's console.

85%



RIFF: EVERYDAY SHOOTER

- » **PUBLISHER:** SONY
- » **DOWNLOAD:** PLAYSTATION NETWORK
- » **COST:** £4.99

This delightful blaster has been out for a while now but it definitely deserves your recognition. A beautiful fusion of abstract sight and sound that mimics *Rez* and *Every Extend Extra*, *Riff: Everyday Shooter*'s main challenge is in discovering the chaining combos to be found on each of its eight levels. Clever and subtle and with an absolute wealth of extras to unlock, this is a stunning shooter that sounds as good as it looks. Utterly essential.

91%

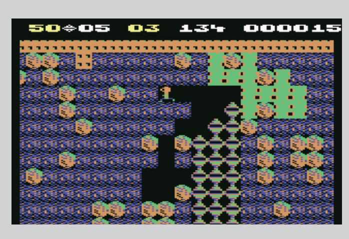


DUKE NUKEM 3D

- » **PUBLISHER:** 3D REALMS
- » **DOWNLOAD:** XBOX LIVE ARCADE
- » **COST:** 800 POINTS

While the world and his dog wait forever for Duke Nukem's first high-def outing, we're more than happy to go back to his original 3D adventure. Filled with humour, brilliantly designed set pieces and some truly memorable bosses, *Duke Nukem 3D* is an excellent blaster that more than matches id's Live Arcade masterpiece. It's a shame that we're stuck with the PC original and not one of the better conversions that followed, but this is still fantastic stuff. Hail to the king, baby.

89%



BOULDER DASH

- » **PUBLISHER:** COMMODORE
- » **DOWNLOAD:** VIRTUAL CONSOLE
- » **COST:** 500 POINTS

The C64 has been a massive success on the Virtual Console, probably because of the amount of exceptional games that have been chosen to appear on it. *Boulder Dash* is another excellent example, and while this 24-year-old game looks every bit its age, it's as addictive as ever and deserves to be downloaded. Level design throughout is brilliant, and while certain mazes are impossible to complete if you make a single mistake, it remains a truly polished piece of work.

86%

REVIEW

METAL SLUG 7

'BLEED! AIN'T GOT TIME TO BLEED'

INFORMATION

- **SYSTEM:** DS
- **PRICE:** £29.99
- **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- **PUBLISHER:** SNK PLAYMORE
- **PLAYERS:** 1





»The game does actually have a few tricks up its sleeve – this *Indiana Jones* bit is a neat set piece… although you do have to be ridiculously inept at videogames to get squished by this rolling boulder.



»The single-player missions are fun but ultimately they feel like they're missing something to edge them into the echelons of a classic *Metal Slug* campaign.



Somewhere on a server in SNK Playmore's headquarters sits a folder called 'Metal Slug Sprites'. It's crammed full with every single background, enemy, character, weapon and vehicle sprite ever used in a *Metal Slug* game. It exists so that – should the time call for Marco and co to return to service – SNK Playmore simply has to copy, paste (ad nauseam) and design a few more bosses that look like tanks.

Despite our cynical lead in to this review of the latest *Metal Slug* game, we're actually huge fans of the series. But *Metal Slug* is, and it always will be, *Metal Slug* – and by that we mean anyone remotely familiar with the games will be able to work out exactly what to expect with each new instalment of the franchise. For us, the series has been on a slow decline ever since the release of *Metal Slug 3*. To put it bluntly, *Metal Slug 7* is far better than the last few games in the franchise, but, unfortunately, it still isn't quite a patch on the glory days of old.

The game's visuals look impressive, the character animation is smooth, and the tiny bit of slowdown that pops up whenever the action gets typically hectic is rare and won't affect your enjoyment and experience. The game also adds some nice new features and bonuses. You can now set your guns to auto-fire in the options screen, which is helpful, and there's the new Combat School mode, which is basically a collection of criterion sub-games, which helps to eke a little more life from the main game.

The biggest criticism we have about *Metal Slug 7*, though, is that it's just far too easy. Even the boss encounters, although both imaginative and exhilarating, are abnormally lightweight compared to the pad-tossing biomechanical menaces that have plagued fans of the series in previous capers. While it's refreshing to be given just five credits to try to finish the game with, with seven missions, each feeling slightly too short, those who are familiar with the series will easily walk the game with a few credits to spare.

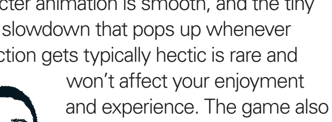
To some extent, there's an argument that the toning down of the difficulty level could be a purposeful gambit, it's certainly a notion backed up by the game's new coin-grab feature. Repeatedly pummelling enemies with gunfire now builds up a meter at the base of the screen. When this meter is at its maximum, all blasted enemies will momentarily explode into a shower of coins. Picking these coins up quickly and in a chain will exponentially raise their value. So, if you're anything like us, *Metal Slug 7* quickly becomes an addictive score-chaser, as opposed to a tortuous shooter.











OPINION

After the disappointment that was *Card Fighters Clash*, I was a little worried about how *Metal Slug 7* would turn out. As it happens the end result is a surprisingly slick little shooter that, while a little generic in places, still has enough neat little touches to keep *Slug* fans happy. The wimpy difficulty factor is something of an issue, and the loss of multiple routes harm it somewhat, but there's still a surprising amount of fun to be had. Not being able to use the DS to its full capabilities is a bit disappointing, but *Metal Slug 7* remains a solid (if rather simple) blaster. **Darran Jones**

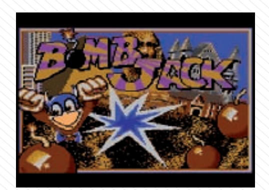
HOMEBREW RATED

COLLECTING MAGICAL POTIONS AND EXPLOSIVE DEVICES SINCE THE EIGHTIES

BOMB JACK



SOMEBODY SET UP US THE BOMB!



FORMAT: EXPANDED ATARI 8-BIT
DEVELOPED BY: TEBE, VEGA, TEZZ AND MIKER
LINK: HTTP://ATARIONLINE.PL/V01/INDEX.PHTML?CT=KATALOG&SUB=B&TG=BOMB+JACK#BOMB_JACK
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW
PRICE: FREE
REVIEWED BY: JASON KELK

For those unaware of the original Tehkan coin-op, *Bomb Jack* sees a superhero (called Jack, we assume) travelling the world to collect and defuse bombs… well, everybody needs a hobby. Of course, that wouldn't make for much of a game, so each location is patrolled by a group of birds, mummies and flying robots, but since he's a superhero Jack can clear tall buildings in one bound and, with repeated stabs of the jump button, hover in midair.

The first thing that strikes you is the excellent presentation. There are several detailed and colourful attract screens, the in-game background graphics range from reasonable to the excellent Bavarian castle scene, and the music fits the bill throughout. The sprites can sometimes become 'lost' in the background detail if they stop moving, but that isn't a major issue with a game as lively as this.

The developers have stated that they took the game logic from the C64 port rather than the arcade original, but it seems to have been retuned quite considerably during that process and plays far better in this guise. In fact, the only real problem has to be the memory requirement; *Bomb Jack* is chock-full of graphics and sound and the minimum specification is an expanded 320K machine. Owners of standard units will either have to look at beefing up their Atari or playing via emulation.

THE SCORES

PRESENTATION: 86% No options but a decent score table.
AESTHETICS: 89% Some superb graphics and a great selection of tunes.
PLAYABILITY: 89% Classic arcade action, easy to get into and hard to master.
LONGEVITY: 85% If the levels are mastered it can be played for score.
VALUE FOR MONEY: N/A
OVERALL: 90%

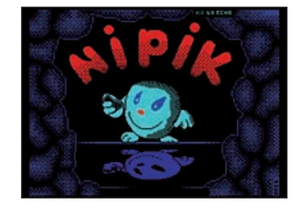




» Jack really builds up the air miles during his adventures.

NIPIK 2

WHAT'S ROUND AND LIVES IN A MAZE?



FORMAT: 128K SPECTRUM
DEVELOPED BY: TRIUMPH
LINK: HTTP://PC.SUX.ORG/TOMCAT/NIPIK2.RAR
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW
PRICE: FREE
REVIEWED BY: JASON KELK

We've always assumed that there must be a production line somewhere that churns out mazes for 8-bit games, presumably staffed by Alan Titchmarsh lookalikes who tend to the hedges that make up the various designs until they're ready to be digitised. We also expect they have a deal with a wholesaler bearing a resemblance to George Cole with a lock-up stocked with bottles containing viscous liquids and huge, head-sized diamonds to scatter around these mazes.

The developer of *Nipik 2*, Triumph, has used George and Alan's services extensively, then handed the task of collecting green goop and other assorted pick-up items that appear around the play area to a rotund but apparently happy creature.

But Nipik (well, we guess that's the blob's name) isn't alone and must also avoid a mixed cast of enemies, each of which has a unique movement pattern to learn. Although some interlacing has been used and the resulting flicker can be a little harsh on the eyes during prolonged play, *Nipik 2* has some nicely detailed graphics, the player is cute and the attackers detailed. The walls of the mazes could have been a bit more colourful, but everything else is distinct and the only real issue visually is the way that nasties are sometimes concealed behind each other or the power-ups. 20 levels aren't enough to keep most players going for long, but *Nipik 2* is fun to play while it lasts.



» Be sure to avoid all of the weird and wonderful enemies.



» Although short, *Nipik 2* will give you plenty of enjoyment.

THE SCORES

PRESENTATION: 74% Loading screen and high-score table, but no joystick option.
AESTHETICS: 79% Good graphics and a reasonable soundtrack.
PLAYABILITY: 84% Simple but entertaining maze-based fun.
LONGEVITY: 80% Only the 20 levels, but not the easiest game of its kind.
VALUE FOR MONEY: N/A
OVERALL: 82%

A NINTENDO DOUBLE BILL – NEW NES AND VIRTUAL BOY ENTERTAINMENT!

PEGS

NOT BEING SOLD DOOR TO DOOR

FORMAT: NES
DEVELOPED BY: ROBERT L BRYANT
LINK: HTTP://ROBERTLBRYANT.COM/GAMING/PEGS.HTM
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW
PRICE: FREE
REVIEWED BY: JASON KELK



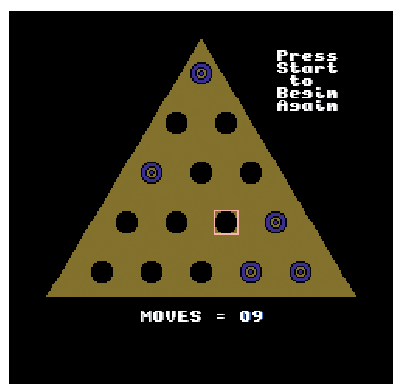
Peg solitaire has been around for years in one form or another. The game is simplicity itself – the player is presented with a board that has a series of holes with all but one containing a peg, with the objective being to jump pegs over their neighbours, then remove jumped pegs from play.

This NES version uses a triangular board with 15 holes and the empty slot is chosen by the player when the game begins. It's then a case of selecting which pegs to move and their destinations (with the game helpfully only allowing legal moves) until no more jumps are possible, at which

You made a total of
13 moves, which means
you left 1 peg on
the board. Your status:

Rad Dude!

» The language may be dated, but *Pegs* is still good fun.



» You have made a mistake. You will not succeed.

point the player is given a summary of their performance – how many pegs remaining, a pithy comment about their playing prowess and a little surprise should they only have that elusive single peg.

Graphically, *Pegs* is only average and while the sampled speech is a nice touch, the music is rather weak as well. However, annoying as the tunes may become, that can be overlooked. Something harder to ignore is the lack of long-term replay value, and the only longevity comes from trying to clear the board with a single peg remaining from the small number of starting positions. Had *Pegs* featured preset game boards and preferably



» You put your left peg in.

included the more complex 33 or 37 hole layouts alongside the triangular one, there would have been far more depth.

THE SCORES

PRESENTATION: 69% Music selector, credit screen but no scores or tables.
AESTHETICS: 74% Reasonable graphics, but the music is weak.
PLAYABILITY: 80% It'll take some time to find all of the solutions…
LONGEVITY: 66% …but once that's done there isn't much else to do.
VALUE FOR MONEY: N/A
OVERALL: 72%

VB RACING

MIRROR, SIGNAL… ACCELERATE WILDLY!



FORMAT: VIRTUAL BOY
DEVELOPED BY: MARTIN KUJACZYNSKI
LINK: WWW.VR32.DE/
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW
PRICE: FREE
REVIEWED BY: JASON KELK

The open road, a fast car and the thrill of hammering along a three-lane motorway with the top down… *VB Racing* is a stab at re-creating this experience for Nintendo's Virtual Boy, with one major difference being that, due to the colour of the screens in the hardware, the blonde in the passenger seat has been transformed into a redhead!

While *VB Racing* does bear some cosmetic similarities to *OutRun*, it probably plays more like 16-bit racers such as the *Lotus Turbo Challenge* series, albeit with the action taking place at a more sedate pace. Despite the speedometer registering



» You may want to keep some paracetamol handy when playing.



» I can lock all my doors, it's the only way to live.

over 200km/h when driving flat out, there isn't a great sense of speed produced as the roadside objects pass by. *VB Racing* doesn't have a lot of variety to that scenery either, although the road undulates nicely and there is a unique skyline for each stage, after that it's just trees whizzing past and, for some bizarre reason, the only other vehicles sharing the motorway with the player appear to be vans.

With over two minutes on the timer at the start of each stage and no checkpoints to break up the journey from the start to finish, things can become pretty repetitive. But even with all of that considered, this is a brave attempt at getting a spot of racing



» You'll be lucky to see the odd tree on your journey.

action on to the Virtual Boy and is still reasonably enjoyable in its current form. Hopefully a future version will improve on this promising start.

THE SCORES

PRESENTATION: 51% No options, just a page of text for the credits, in fact.
AESTHETICS: 70% Reasonable graphics, but not much variety.
PLAYABILITY: 82% Easy enough to grasp and have some fun with.
LONGEVITY: 60% No serious challenge in the long-term.
VALUE FOR MONEY: N/A
OVERALL: 70%



SIMON'S TOP FIVE

MENTAL KOMBAT was my first game for the Atari VCS. All of its code, sounds and graphics fit into 4K and it was released as a limited edition of 100 boxed carts (along with headbands!) in 2002.

A-VCS-TEC CHALLENGE is most well known due to its C64 ancestor. Original C64 author Paul Norman supported my development of this 8K game and my site even has photos of Nolan Bushnell and Ralph Baer playing the game.

ELIMIN8! is a horizontal scrolling shooting game in 1K (1,024 bytes). It won this year's 1K competition at www.minigamecomp.org.uk and includes nine levels with increasing difficulty.

PIR8! is a 2K game for the Commodore 64 that I entered in the 2K MiniGameCompetition. The gameplay is around 35 screens wide and offers horizontal scrolling in both directions.

SHOTGATE is a 4K game with 26 levels on the C64 and allows you to jump between two temporary gates. The music and sound effects were contributed by Lasse Öörni – the *Metal Warrior* creator.

HOMEBREW HEROES

SIMON QUERNHORST



EAGER TO LEAVE NO STONE UNTURNED IN OUR PURSUIT OF HOMEBREW EXCELLENCE, OUR NEXT HERO IS SIMON QUERNHORST. HIS CONTINUED COMMITMENT TO THE C64 AND ATARI 2600 JUST HAS TO BE APPLAUDED

Retro Gamer: So, Simon, how did you first get into coding?

Simon Quernhorst: I received my first C64 in 1987 and started assembler programming in 1989 along with some friends from school. I entered the C64 scene in the Nineties and have been a member of some quite popular groups. I decided to stop my C64 activities in 2001 and concentrated on videogame collecting and started programming on the Atari VCS. In 2008, I decided to programme a new game for the C64 again and as the interest was raised I have since created seven C64 mini-games for it.

RG: You've made most of your games and demos on the Atari 2600. What do you like most about it?

SQ: I consider the C64 and Atari VCS as my favourite systems not only in programming, but in collecting, too. Programming the Atari VCS resulted from a small bet with a friend, because that machine is considered as being one of the toughest to programme for.

Knowing that the VCS has got a similar processor as the C64, I stated that I would be able to release a working cartridge game for that system within one year. It worked out pretty well and as there was great feedback, I decided to continue VCS programming. My fifth VCS game is ready right now and will be available for sale very soon. I decided to create a total of seven VCS games and I've already got ideas for the remaining two titles.

RG: Where did the inspiration for your first game *Mental Kombat* originate?

SQ: It is inspired by *4 In A Row*, but instead of adding new tiles, you simply move them around. I programmed a C64 intro for a similar game ten years ago and I thought that this kind of board game would be the perfect first title for me to learn VCS programming, because it consisted of a steady screen and left enough space for some graphic effects.

RG: How long do games normally take to create?

SQ: As it is only a hobby for me, the creation period depends on the amount of work on the job and at home. *RasterFahndung* was done within two months while *A-VCS-tec Challenge* took about four years to finish. Programming the Atari VCS is much more time-consuming than programming a comparable size of game for the C64, because you have to do everything yourself: there is no ROM, no charset, no video memory and so on.

RG: Do you make any money from your efforts?

SQ: I do the programming just for fun and the amount of invested time would ruin any realistic price. I produce limited runs of the games with boxes and bonus items (CD, dogtags, headbands, patches and so on) and sell them to collectors all over the world. The limited editions are calculated to bring in the costs and add a small bonus for myself, but it is not profitable. It is just a hobby for me, I like creating new games of tiny size and I am happy that collectors like the games so much that they spend money on the limited editions.

RG: Considering how quickly the *Metal Warrior Trilogy* was snapped up, have you ever been tempted to produce more?

SQ: No. I promise all collectors that I keep the limited editions of all published items fixed to the announced amounts. As the game and demo files are available for free on the internet, everybody can play and enjoy the games, but the limited editions stay in the hands of collectors. I keep the lists of owners on my website to show the collectors that I do not produce any more copies. When I released the limited edition of *Mental Kombat* in 2002, it was unusual to have special versions with enhanced material for collectors – nowadays it is quite common that new computer and videogames, as well as movie DVDs, are released in different versions: standard and collector's editions.

RG: Which of the games you've produced are you most proud of and why?

SQ: I like all of my games, because I created them in order to please one person: myself. So I try to include new technical effects and as much gameplay as possible in the set amount of memory. Right now I am focused on 1K, 2K and 4K games, because of the challenge of minimalism and simplicity. I am proud of the PAL/NTSC routines in *Mental Kombat*, the graphics and music of *A-VCS-tec Challenge*, the memory usage of *RasterFahndung*, the introduction screen of *Encaved*, *Elimin8!* winning this years 1K MiniGameComp, *4K4U* reaching sixth place at BreakPoint 2008 and most of all: the positive feedback on all demos and games. Every one of my programs makes me proud somehow.

RG: Would you consider working on any other systems apart from the C64 and Atari 2600?

SQ: Sure. However, I would still prefer machines that contain the MOS 65xx CPU, because of my limited spare time. Other machines based on that CPU are, for example, the NES and Atari 7800, but unfortunately these two contain lockout chips to make it harder to create new cartridges for these systems. We will see what the future brings, but right now I am satisfied with my favourite systems, the C64 and VCS.

RG: Out of the two machines, which do you prefer to work with and why?

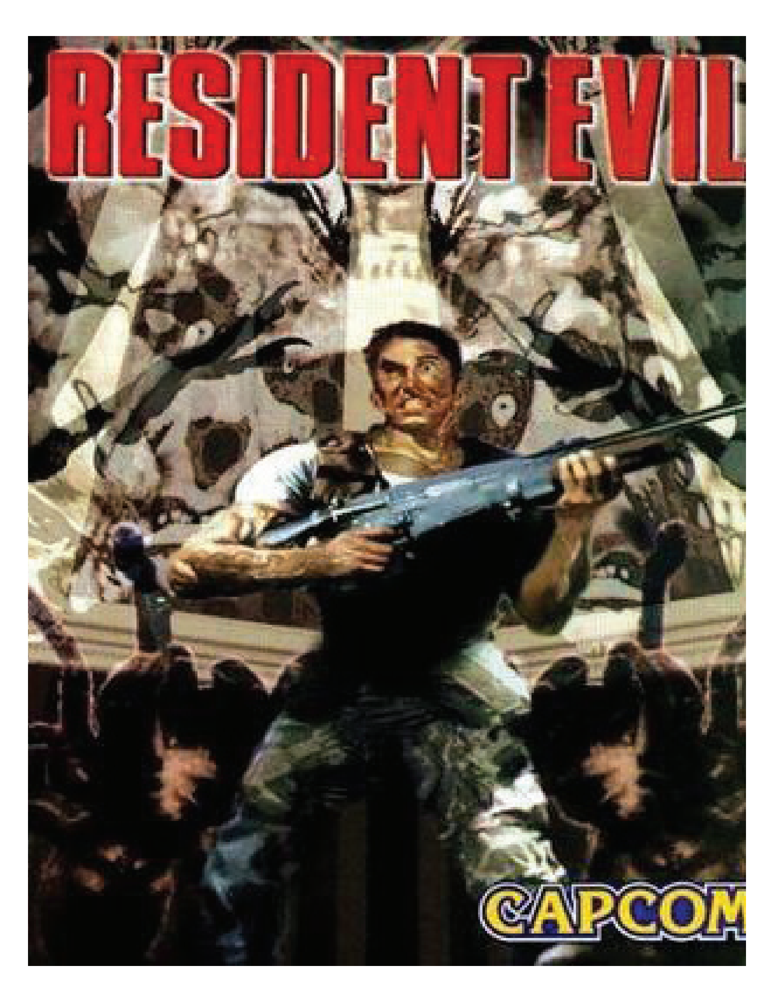
SQ: Well, the Commodore 64 is easier to programme: you get first results much faster and can play and change things directly in the memory of the computer itself. Programming the VCS means creating your own display routines dedicated to the needs of the individual game and investing more time in planning the memory layout. Another advantage of the Commodore 64 is that you can use packers/crunchers to shorten the files. In the case of my game *Pir8!*, the original file is about 3.5K, while the compressed file only uses 2K. Due to the lack of memory you cannot depack something into the RAM of the VCS. I strive for new effects, nice graphics and gameplay on both systems and I do not prefer one of them over the other.

RG: Can you tell us of any projects you're working on at the moment?

SQ: My next Commodore 64 project is called *R8ro!* (R-eight-tro). I envision it to be an 8K cartridge containing eight mini-games. Five of the games are already finished and have been entered in mini-game competitions on the internet. I'm also working on my planned two Atari VCS games and have got some other projects in mind or at very earlier stages. All games and demos are mentioned on my website at www.quernhorst.de/atari.

RG: Why do you think the homebrew scene remains so popular?

SQ: I was born in 1975 and for me personally it is a fact of having grown up with that stuff – as I still prefer the music and comics from my youth and I also enjoy the old computers from that era. Everybody knows the limited abilities of the old hardware, but the homebrew scene still tries to release something new and good-looking for these old buddies. I also play games on all other systems up to the Wii, but I assume that the newer machines will never take over the place of my favourite systems. I really like all the efforts people spend on creating retro websites, magazines, music and games and I hope that this will keep on going for quite some time…



RESIDENT EVIL

So you've survived the terrible horrors residing inside the mansion, but nothing prepares you for the horror that was the Resident Evil character actors. You thought the explosive intro was hammy, just wait until you slay this beast…











SCREEN 1
So, Albert Wesker reveals that he's been working from Umbrella and decides it might be a good idea to spring a powerful biomechanical super-being from out of his glass prison. Nice one, Val Kilmer.

SCREEN 2
After blowing the tyrant to pieces, courtesy of a well-timed rocket, our heroes (and Barry Burton) escape via chopper just in time, as the place is set to explode any second. You could cut the tension with an inflatable spoon.

SCREEN 3
'See you in hell, mansion,' scream our heroes as they heroically fly off into the grey clouds. 'Hope that place wasn't a listed building,' spurts Barry. 'Cram it you hairy double-crossing, fat-faced idiot,' shouts Jill.

SCREEN 4
Barry, a little narked at Jill's unappreciative and hurtful words, pulls out a gun. Snarling and spitting curt profanities like an angry wildebeest, he aims the nozzle at Jill's chest and squeezes the trigger.

SCREEN 5
Tragically, Jill dies instantly. She breathes her last breath and her lifeless right ear comes to rest on Chris's left shoulder. Chris smiles sinisterly at Barry, and the pair live happily ever after. Case closed. Fin. Well done.